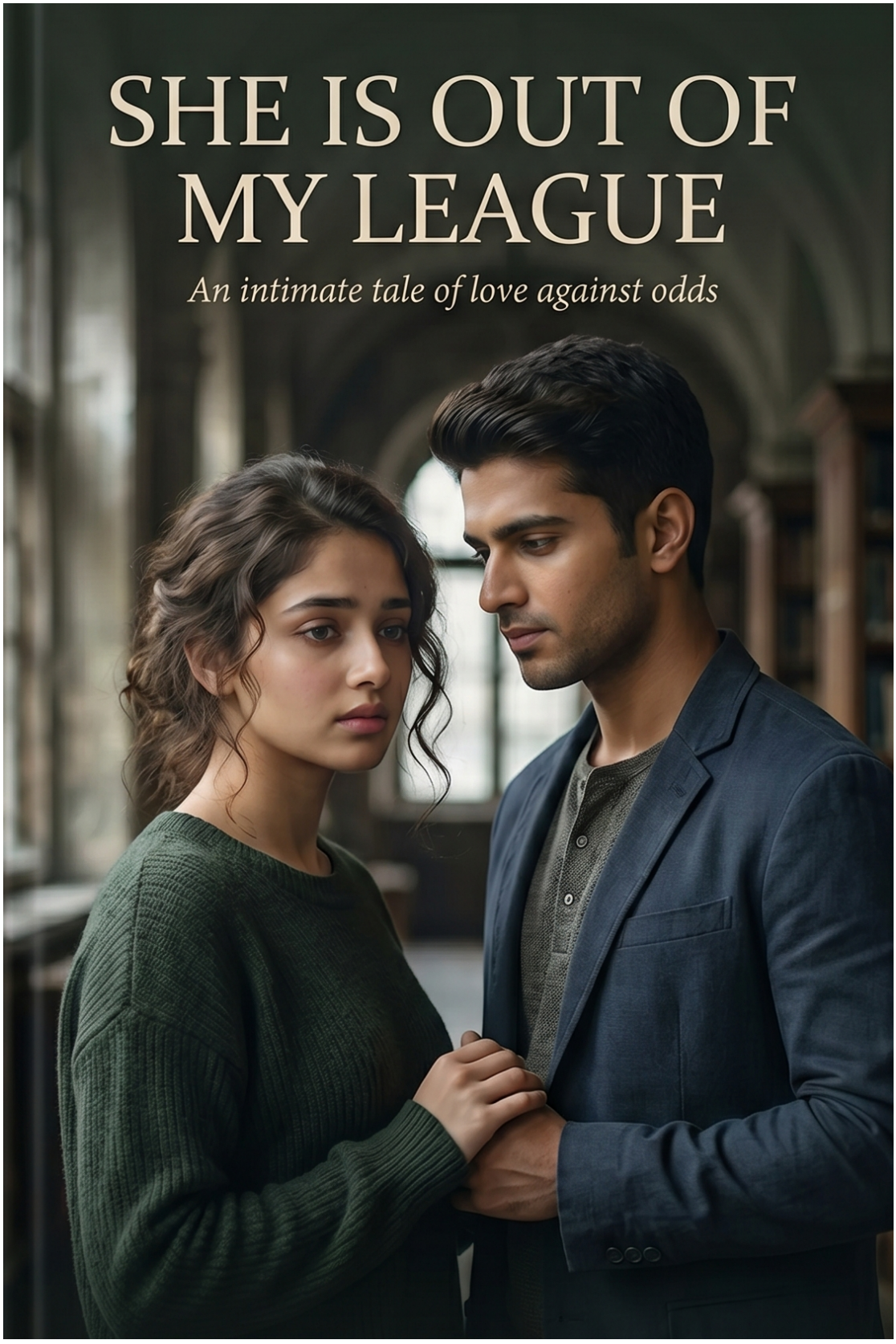
SHE IS OUT OF MY LEAGUE
An intimate tale of love against odds

SHE IS OUT OF MY LEAGUE

Censored Edition

Starring 'Adira'

Overview

Adira has always preferred the quiet—hidden in the corners, watching, feeling everything a little too deeply. She's shy, emotional, and cautious, afraid of being seen too clearly. Rudra, on the other hand, moves through the world with confidence and logic, balanced between people and solitude, never letting his emotions get the better of him…until Adira.

When their paths cross, it's chaotic. They clash. They resist. And yet, no matter how hard they try, there's a pull between them they can't explain. It's magnetic, confusing, and a little terrifying. Every encounter leaves Adira trembling and Rudra questioning himself in ways he's never done before.

They have nothing in common—or so it seems. And yet, somehow, that very difference draws them together. But connection is never easy. Every moment of joy comes tangled with doubt. Every step forward feels shadowed by fear. Can two hearts so different find a rhythm together, or will the very things that attract them become the walls that keep them apart?

What challenges will they face? Can they hold onto this fragile, messy happiness, or is it just a beautiful moment before life pulls them away? Is this the beginning of something real…or the end of collision neither of them will forget?

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Chapter 1 :

The Sweet Beginning

"...meri khata h k, tuze pata ni"

1. Him

Rudra's world was neatly compartmentalized. He was tall, thin, with a fair complexion that seemed almost untouched by the world's chaos. But his rigid nature told a different story, one that was more complicated than his outward appearance. Inside, there was a storm of unspoken thoughts, quiet desires, and unresolved feelings. A recent breakup had left scars, ones he wasn't ready to talk about, even with himself.

He had become what he liked to call an "ambivert." Open to talking, but always maintaining a careful distance. A person who enjoyed the company of others, but only on his terms. Conversations in the office were strictly about work—nothing more, nothing less. He never invited people to get-togethers, never showed up to office parties. He wasn't a recluse, but he had learned that the less you engaged, the less you risked.

After the breakup, his daily routine became his anchor, his way of holding the pieces of himself together. Lunch breaks were sacred—a walk, just him and his thoughts, away from the buzz of the office. Afterward, as the day wound down, he'd take another solitary stroll in the garden near the office. The world didn't feel as chaotic during these walks. In fact, it seemed to make sense.

In time, others began to follow his example, perhaps inspired by his consistency, perhaps by his quiet resilience. Some walked with him, others with different groups, but it didn't matter. Rudra didn't need company to feel whole. Slowly, though, he became a reliable figure—someone who got things done, who people could count on for a task, but not for friendship.

2. Her

It had been a year and a half since Rudra walked into the office with his walls firmly in place. He had earned a certain respect from his colleagues, not because of charm or social grace, but because of his undeniable work ethic. People respected that.

Then came, a day that would disrupt his perfect routine. A new intern named Adira joined the office. Her presence was subtle, almost quiet. She sat facing the wall, her focus entirely on the screen in front of her, but something about her seemed familiar. Rudra noticed her immediately, but it wasn't her face that caught his attention—it was her back. She had the same posture, the same way of sitting, the same type of glasses.

For a moment, it felt like his past had walked into the room. He couldn't place it, but there was something so strikingly familiar about her. A pang shot through his chest, one that made him pause, even as he tried to keep his professional distance. She reminded him of someone he used to know, someone who had once been a part of his life.

He dismissed the thought quickly—he couldn't afford to get tangled in nostalgia. But the feeling persisted. Every time he saw her, every time he caught a glimpse of her movements or her profile, the memories resurfaced. The shape of her body, the way her glasses framed her face, the soft voice she used when she did speak—all of it was unsettlingly familiar.

Adira was quiet, introverted. She didn't talk much to anyone, keeping to herself in the corner of the office. She had a soft, almost delicate voice, and her choice of clothing—simple yet refined—set her apart from the other office workers. A pink kurti, modest yet elegant, that gave her an almost ethereal presence.

Rudra, ever the silent observer, tried even harder to ignore the growing sense of déjà vu. Every interaction he had with her was strictly professional, and he made sure it stayed that way. The last thing he needed was to open the door to memories he wasn't ready to face.
But Adira's presence lingered in his mind, a constant reminder of things he had buried deep within himself.

3. Flinch

Rudra's world had always been built on the belief that people needed to be shaken out of their shells. He had spent years trapped within his own introversion, fighting against it, convinced that it was a weakness. Now, his approach to introverts was simple: provoke them. Whether it was a subtle poke or a sharper push, he wanted to see them react, to draw something out of them, even if it meant making them uncomfortable. It was his way of challenging the quiet, and, in a strange way, of confronting the silence he'd once lived in himself.

When he first noticed Adira, he saw her as a puzzle—another introvert wrapped in her own protective bubble. She kept to herself, tucked away in her corner of the office, quiet and withdrawn. He saw it as a challenge. *Why wasn't she talking? What was holding her back?* Rudra didn't understand why someone so quiet had to remain that way, and his instinct was to break through that barrier—whether she was ready for it or not.

But the issue was, they were in different fields of work. He had no real excuse to talk to her. There was no professional reason, no official task he could use as an opening. The more he watched her, the more he felt the urge to reach out, but the lines of professionalism kept him at bay.

It irritated him. Why was she so closed off? Was she waiting for someone to talk to her? Or was she really just content to stay in the background? *Maybe she was a lost cause, someone too far gone into their own world to connect,* he thought. Still, that thought didn't sit well with him. He couldn't help but wonder whether there was more beneath the surface. But for now, he remained distant, observing her from a distance, unsure how to break the ice.

4 . The Weird Encounter

Despite his internal battle to ignore Adira, something kept pulling him toward her. It was like a magnetic force he couldn't escape, one that made him feel compelled to reach out, even though every rational part of him told him to leave things alone. Then, one day, Adira left the office early, claiming she wasn't feeling well.

Rudra barely registered the fact she was gone, consumed with his own work. But when the person sitting next to Adira approached him with some paperwork, he found himself walking past her desk. And that's when he saw it.

A stain.

A dark spot on the chair, something small yet noticeable. His immediate thought was, *What the hell?* A faint frown creased his forehead as he quickly processed the situation. His curiosity got the better of him for a split second, and he thought about sitting in her chair. But the stain held him back. Something about it felt out of place. He couldn't understand why it was there, nor why it seemed so significant in that moment.

He quickly made his way back to his desk, resolving the issue he had been working on, but his mind couldn't let go of the image of the stain. And then, a realization hit him. Adira had left early because of something—likely the stain. The pieces clicked together, and for the first time, he understood why she had left in such a rush. It wasn't just a health issue. She had left to handle something personal, something private.

The next day, when Adira returned to work, Rudra watched her quietly sit down at her desk. She was calm, her demeanor unchanged, but the stain still lingered in his mind. When she left for break, Rudra saw his chance.

He stood up and walked over to her chair, glancing around to make sure no one else was around. The stain still there, stubbornly present. He knew this was his moment to speak to her. He could use this as an excuse—a way to finally bridge the gap between them. He cleared his throat, trying to act casual, and said, "Hey, just so you know, your chair... it has a stain on it."

It wasn't the best conversation starter. In fact, it felt awkward—strangely impersonal for what was supposed to be an introduction. Rudra immediately regretted bringing it up. He could see the discomfort in Adira's eyes, even though she didn't say anything. *Was this really how he wanted to start talking to her?* His mind spiraled, realizing that he had just pointed out something deeply personal, something that might have made her uncomfortable.

In that moment, Rudra was embarrassed. He could feel the weight of the misstep, the awkwardness settling between them. *This was probably it,* he thought. *This would be their first and last conversation.* He had broken the unspoken barrier between them, but the way he did it felt all wrong.

Rudra was a deep thinker—too deep, sometimes. He couldn't help but dissect every word, every action. And now, he couldn't shake the feeling that he had just ruined any chance of connecting with Adira. She probably didn't want to talk to him, especially after such an uncomfortable opening.

But maybe, just maybe, something would come out of this. Even if it was just one awkward conversation, it was a step forward. Or so he hoped in doubt.

The collision in conversation with Adira haunted Rudra long after it happened. Every word he had spoken played on repeat in his mind, like an old record skipping. *Was it too much? Did I offend her? Was it inappropriate to point out the stain?*

Rudra's thoughts spiraled into an emotional mess. He had a habit of pushing people, trying to get them to open up in ways that felt natural to him but might not be to others. He had learned to detach emotionally after his breakup, and now he wondered if he was doing the same thing to Adira—invading her space, prying into her privacy, and not respecting her boundaries.

His colleagues had often confided in him about their personal issues, even things like period pain, which seemed normal to him, a sign of closeness. Maybe it wasn't such a big deal to point out a stain. He rationalized that it could just be another awkward conversation that might not matter.

But it did matter. *Didn't it?* He couldn't get rid of the discomfort he felt when he replayed it. What if Adira had been hurt? What if she had felt embarrassed? The uncertainty gnawed at him.

During the next break, Rudra decided to test his theory. He couldn't sit with the ambiguity any longer. So, he casually approached the person sitting next to Adira, asking about something trivial. Then, he asked another person, and soon enough, he was speaking with her—slowly, carefully, like breaking the surface of a frozen pond.

He prodded her in the same indirect way he had before. Little by little, the conversation opened up, and the tension in Adira's words began to dissipate. Her response was calm, almost matter-of-fact: "It wasn't really wrong to say that." It was such a simple acknowledgment, but for Rudra, it was like the sky clearing after a storm.

The relief washed over him. *Okay, maybe it wasn't as bad as He thought.* It seemed that he hadn't caused irreparable damage. He had broken the ice, and Adira hadn't been offended. That was progress, wasn't it?

5 .Fresh Start

The routine continued. Rudra, as usual, went for his evening walk alone, though sometimes a few girls from the office would join him. He didn't mind either way. But he found himself wishing Adira would step outside her shell. He wanted to see her loosen up, to feel comfortable enough to walk with him, just like the others. Maybe it was because he felt a connection with her, one he didn't quite understand yet, or maybe it was the lingering feeling that her introversion needed to be challenged. *Why was she so closed off?*

He tried to coax her into walking with him. At first, he was gentle, suggesting it like a casual invitation. "The other girls are going. You can join us." Adira's response was blunt—*No.*

But Rudra, ever the persistent force, didn't back off. He kept trying, one attempt after another, each time with the same reaction. *No, no, no.* He wasn't about to give up, though. If there was one thing Rudra didn't do, it was give in easily. So, with an air of challenge, he poked her again.

And then, by sheer luck, one of his colleagues chimed in, agreeing that it was safe and fine to walk nearby. Adira, after a long pause, hesitated but agreed. Rudra couldn't believe it—she was walking with him.

The walk wasn't long, and the conversation was casual, but it was a start. For Rudra, it was a victory. It wasn't about making her into something she wasn't; it was about helping her feel comfortable, opening up a little space in her world. This was what he had been after, all along—breaking through her walls, one step at a time.

6.Break Through

Days passed, and the routine of their evening walks became a comforting rhythm for Rudra. The small, quiet moments of conversation with Adira were like pieces of a puzzle slowly falling into place. He could see her relax, bit by bit, as the walls she had built around herself began to crumble.

She was no longer the quiet, distant figure who refused to speak, who stayed hidden in her corner. Slowly, she had started interacting with the others too. Even when they weren't walking together, Rudra noticed her engaging with colleagues more, her once-guarded nature loosening.

As much as Rudra felt a quiet sense of pride in this transformation—*I've helped her come out of her shell, I've achieved my goal*—there was something else creeping in. He began to see Adira differently. More than just a shy girl who needed coaxing out of her shell, he started noticing the way her eyes softened when she laughed, the gentleness in her smile, and the quiet strength in her presence. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but he began to admire her in ways that went beyond the challenge of making her comfortable.

Then one day, as they were walking together, Adira received a call. She stepped aside, her voice low as she spoke to someone. Rudra was half-listening, but as she spoke, something in her tone caught his attention. She was offering advice, calm and grounded, handling the situation with an understanding that Rudra hadn't expected. Her words were thoughtful, insightful even. It was like watching a completely different side of her, one he hadn't seen before.

Her voice, soft yet sure, made Rudra pause. The way she dealt with the call, the way she communicated—it was different from what he had expected. *She's not just this quiet, emotionally fragile person,* he thought. *She's stronger than I gave her credit for.*

For the first time, Rudra saw Adira not as a project or a challenge, but as a person—someone with depth, someone who could hold her own. In that moment, something shifted in him. She wasn't just the "introvert" he had worked so hard to break through.

She was someone who had the potential to be a strong partner in life, someone who could handle more than he had originally thought.

His thoughts, once filled with doubts and the desire to fix her, were now laced with something new.

As he watched her from the corner of his eye on their walks, listening to her thoughts and opinions, Rudra found himself drawn to her in ways he hadn't expected. It wasn't just physical attraction, although that too was undeniable.

As days passed and their walks became more frequent, Rudra couldn't deny the growing shift in how he viewed Adira. She was no longer just an introverted colleague he had helped break free from her shell. She had become someone *he* wanted to share his life with—not because he needed to fix her or because he wanted to change her, but because she fit into his life in a way no one else ever had.

She could be a soulmate.

The thought terrified him. Soulmates were never part of his plan. They were something other people chased after, something he had written off as an idealistic fantasy. But Adira—she was different. The way she listened when he spoke, the way she didn't rush him when he was quiet, the way she didn't demand, but gently *invited* him to open up—all of that added up to something profound. She could be the one who understood him without needing to be told.

There were times, when the office was empty and the workday was winding down, when Rudra would catch a glimpse of Adira at her desk, her face focused but relaxed, and it would hit him—*This is it. This is the person I could be with.* It wasn't just the ease of their friendship anymore. It wasn't just the conversations they had or the walks they took. It was the *feeling* that she was the one who could stand by him for the long haul. Someone who understood his need for space but also knew when to pull him out of his shell, someone who had the patience to let him come to her on his own terms.

And it wasn't just about emotional compatibility. Rudra was starting to see the practical aspects of a future with her, too.

The way she handled herself in situations—calm, collected, and thoughtful—made him think she would be the kind of partner who could balance his own occasional impulsiveness with grace and patience. She could be someone who could weather the storms of life with him, someone he could face the unknown with, and someone who could make him feel like he wasn't alone, even in the toughest times.

Rudra found himself asking a different question now: *What would it feel like to have her by my side, not just as a friend, but something more likely to have in life.

And so, with each passing day, as the ice continued to melt between them, Rudra's feelings for Adira deepened—slowly, quietly, but surely. He realized that this wasn't just a passing infatuation or a fleeting connection. This was something lasting. Something that could grow, something that *would* grow, if they allowed it to.

But for now, he was content to walk beside her, to simply *be* with her in the moment. Because sometimes, the deepest connections come not from grand gestures, but from the quiet, simple acts of just being there—together.

7 . Shift

With time, the introvert Adira began to open—slowly, almost apologetically—to the world around her. It wasn't sudden or loud. It happened in small gestures: staying a little longer in conversations, smiling without rehearsing it first, allowing people to see past her silence. Her circle grew the way roots do—quietly, beneath the surface, until one day you realize how far they've spread.

The newly joined interns formed a group of their own, drawn together by shared uncertainty and fresh ambition. Adira became noticeable there, not because she tried to be, but because she simply *was*. She was beautiful in a way that didn't ask for attention. Her way of talking—measured, sincere—had a pull to it. For any straight guy, it was difficult not to feel the urge to move closer, to want to protect and embrace her presence.

She had built herself carefully: clean habits, punctuality, discipline. Most of all, she worked independently, never leaning unless absolutely necessary. That quiet self-sufficiency became the very thing Rudra admired the most. It wasn't flashy, but it stayed with him.

Within that group was a boy named Jayesh. Mid-height, curly-haired, introverted, and emotional in the same soft way Adira was. He began hitting on her—not aggressively, but with hesitant affection. Watching them, Rudra noticed the similarities. The same inwardness. The same gentleness. The same pauses before speaking. He told himself they made sense together. That they could be good for each other.

So he pushed Adira gently toward Jayesh.

It wasn't generosity that drove him—it was fear.

Rudra was terrified of his own growing feelings. He wasn't ready to name them, and even less ready to risk them. Letting her go felt safer than wanting her too much.

Complicating everything was Rudra's idealized image of a girl—an image he had carried long before Adira ever existed in his world.

Akshara fit it perfectly. She was part of the intern group too: beautiful, healthy, attractive, quiet, and most importantly—tall. She was everything his mind said he should want.

So while nudging Adira toward Jayesh, Rudra began noticing Akshara more. He tried to check in on her, to redirect his attention, to convince himself that this was the logical choice.

But the heart is rarely logical.

No matter how closely he observed Akshara, his heart refused to loosen its grip on Adira. Even though she wasn't his idealized figure, even though she broke the rules he had written for himself, one look at her undone smile was enough to undo him completely.

And Adira—she wasn't being swayed either.

Jayesh's feelings never settled into her heart the way others expected. She cared for him, yes, but only in the clean, uncomplicated way of friendship. There was no quiet thrill, no secret hope. He simply didn't reach her where it mattered.

In the end, both Rudra and Adira failed in the same way.

They tried to choose others over each other.
They tried to be reasonable.
They tried to be safe.

But somewhere beneath all that trying, something unspoken remained—unresolved, lingering, and painfully honest—waiting for the moment one of them would finally be brave enough to stop pretending.

8 .Conversation or Questions?

Adira, by appearance, was beautiful in a way that invited misjudgment. Fragile, sometimes lazy in the eyes of people who didn't look closely enough. Soft-spoken. Quiet. Easy to underestimate.

But beneath that surface lived a strength few ever reached.

She was rich in her work—deeply skilled, sharp, and instinctive with technology that no one else around her truly understood. She worked alone not because she wanted isolation, but because she had no choice. The system she handled was hers almost entirely. Guidance came only occasionally from her manager, like distant stars—visible, but far away. Most days, she carried the weight herself.

And she carried it well.

On their walks, this revealed itself slowly. Conversations often circled back to her work—something new she was trying, a problem that refused to bend, progress made quietly without applause. Even on days she claimed she hadn't worked, work had still been done. That was her nature. There was a spark in her—an inner engine that never fully rested.

What she lacked wasn't ability. It was companionship. No one to rely on. No one to lean against when the mind grew tired. Yet she performed. And people noticed. Her work spoke even when she didn't. With Rudra, something else began to awaken. Curiosity. Not the shy, inward curiosity she'd always lived with—but a brave one. One that pushed against her own personality. She started asking questions that weren't about tasks or deadlines, but about *him*. Personal questions. Scenario-based ones. Quietly private.

"What would you do if…?"
"How would you think about…?"
"Does this make sense to you?"

She didn't need the *right* answers. She wasn't testing him. What she wanted was the collision-her emotional instinct meeting his logical clarity.

Sometimes they clashed. Sometimes they tangled. And somewhere in between, she always found her own truth.
The questions multiplied. Not out of confusion—but connection.

They piled up so much that one day, without ceremony, Adira began maintaining notes. Small reminders of things she wanted to ask him. Thoughts she didn't want to lose. Moments she wanted to return to when they were together.

Rudra learned about the notes much later. And when he did, it stunned him.

The realization that someone carried his perspective with that much care—that his thoughts mattered enough to be written down—unsettled him in the best way. It made him feel chosen. Needed. Important.

Those questions stretched into long conversations.
Conversations turned into meetups.

Sometimes at cafés—tea between them, steam rising as words poured out. Sometimes at temples—silence holding their thoughts, peace wrapping around shared presence.

Each meeting tied them closer, not loudly, not dramatically—but with meaning.

For Rudra, it did something unexpected.

It made him feel special. Not admired. Not desired. But *important*.

Like his presence filled a space that had been empty for a long time. Like his voice steadied someone strong who had been standing alone for too long.

And Adira—without ever saying it—was learning something too:

That strength doesn't disappear when you let someone walk beside you.

9. The Outing

For Rudra, the evening walks had become something of a habit, a time he treasured deeply. He hadn't realized it at first, but as the days passed, the thought of these walks without Adira left a hollow feeling inside him. The familiar route, the soft murmurs of conversation, the gentle rustle of the wind, and her quiet presence beside him—it had all grown into something more than just a routine. The absence, even for a day, now felt like something was missing, a part of his life that wasn't there anymore. And that was unsettling.

It wasn't just the walks anymore; it was the conversations, the messages, the unspoken connection that seemed to be deepening between them. Rudra had always kept his emotional walls high. But Adira was different. She didn't ask for much; she simply existed beside him, with no pressure, no demands. It felt natural. But more importantly, it felt safe. Safe enough that Rudra began to lower his defenses, little by little. And for the first time in what seemed like forever, he didn't feel like he was walking through life alone.

Soon enough, their brief exchanges during those evening walks weren't enough. They had reached a point where the quiet moments between them needed more room to breathe. They began talking through official company messages during office hours. At first, Rudra communicated with her in Hindi, his official language. It felt neutral, practical. But as their communication shifted and grew, so did the emotional undercurrent. Without realizing it, Rudra shifted to his mother tongue, Marathi, when he gave her his private number—a gesture that marked the beginning of a deeper connection.

He had never shared his private number with anyone in the office—*not a single person*. But for some reason, he felt like Adira deserved that level of trust. It wasn't just an act of convenience. It was a step that blurred the lines between professional and personal, a line Rudra had never been willing to cross before. As the messages and calls began to flow more naturally, Rudra couldn't ignore the sense of intimacy that was building. Adira seemed to be growing more comfortable with him, her messages becoming longer, more open. She shared parts of herself with him that she hadn't before—her family, her background, her thoughts on life.

One day, after a few weeks of these growing conversations, Rudra invited her out to a fair. He knew it was an excuse, a simple way to spend time with her outside of the office and talk more freely. What surprised him was the excitement he saw in her eyes when he asked. She wasn't someone who regularly went out, he knew that. But the way she lit up when the invitation was made spoke volumes.

Adira had arranged everything with her family a week in advance. Rudra noticed the careful planning, the quiet excitement that she held in her heart. It wasn't just a casual outing for her—it was something meaningful, a rare chance for her to be herself, and to share something with him. And Rudra, for the first time in a long while, allowed himself to feel the weight of that connection.

When they finally arrived at the fair, the moment felt surreal. The bright lights, the laughter, the buzz of activity around them—it all seemed to fade into the background. What Rudra focused on was Adira's eyes. Every expression on her face, every flicker of joy that passed through her features, was like a window into her soul. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, her smile genuine and unguarded.

She wasn't hiding behind her usual walls anymore. The girl who had once been quiet, introverted, and reserved had become someone Rudra could talk to openly—someone whose vulnerability matched his own, and who wasn't afraid to share it.

As they stood in line for the rides, Rudra wanted to capture the moment, wanted to take a picture of her—the real her—the one who had finally let go, just a little. But something stopped him. He hesitated, unsure if she would feel comfortable with him taking a picture. Instead, he watched her, savoring the moment in his mind, knowing it was one he'd never forget.

10. Growing Connection

After the fair, everything changed. The communication between them didn't stop; it only intensified. Messages became longer, filled with deeper thoughts. They began to call each other more often, and eventually, they met outside the office, a decision that felt entirely natural in hindsight. Their connection had evolved into something that was no longer confined to the boundaries of office hours. It had spilled over into their personal lives, into their free time, and neither of them seemed to mind.

One evening, after a particularly deep conversation with her, Rudra made a decision. He wanted to share his past with her—not just bits and pieces, but the full picture. He had to. If they were going to keep moving forward, if they were going to build something real, she needed to know about his emotional scars, the baggage he had carried for so long.

Adira arrived and They rode to place nearby there hometown with temple and view, together on the same bike, He was filled with a mix of hope and dread.

After exploring place, clicked some pictures and they sat, Adira started talking. She actually talked alot, why not so, topic was her friends past relation tragedy and current good happening, Her excitement was more than something.

After a while , Rudra found the courage to be vulnerable. He opened up to her about his past, his broken relationship, the pain that still lingered beneath the surface. He spoke with raw honesty, his heart pounding in his chest. Every word felt like a release, like he was finally letting go of something that had weighed him down for too long.

Adira listened. She didn't interrupt, didn't offer empty platitudes. She simply listened, her eyes soft, her expression calm. When he finished, she spoke quietly, offering her advice, her thoughts on the situation. She didn't back away. She didn't retreat into herself. She remained there with him, her presence a quiet reassurance. And for the first time in a long while, Rudra felt a sense of peace.

But there was something else. As they spent the day together, talking, sharing lunch, and laughing, something changed. The closeness between them deepened in ways he hadn't expected.

As evening approached, the air between them shifted. It was subtle at first—a quiet understanding, an unspoken connection. As they rode back, Adira took charge of the bike, something Rudra hadn't expected. He sat behind her, keeping a distance but wanting to lean into her warmth, to feel the comfort of her presence. He gently rested his head on her shoulder.

It was a quiet, almost subconscious movement. But Adira didn't pull away. Instead, she approved to his head-down on her shoulder. That was nice feeling of relief and day end with sweet moments.

Days passed, and without either of them noticing, the bond between them grew deeper. It happened quietly—in shared silences, in small smiles, in the comfort of simply being together. Yet inside Rudra, everything was not as calm as it seemed.

Even as warmth settled into his days, his mind remained conflicted. A part of him still clung to the past, to old wounds that had never fully healed. Happiness felt unfamiliar, almost forbidden. Whenever he felt close to peace, a voice inside whispered that it wouldn't last—that something would go wrong, as it always did. It was the residue of his breakup, a shadow that lived quietly in his subconscious.

For years, he had hidden his emotions behind routines and responsibilities, locking them away where no one could reach them. But Adira had slowly undone that armor. With her presence, her patience, her unspoken care, the walls he had built so carefully began to crack. And that scared him. Letting someone in again meant risking pain again—and he wasn't sure he was strong enough for that.

Still, there was no denying the truth. She was already a part of his life. What they shared was real, and it was growing no matter how hard he tried to control it.

He asked her to meet him outside town, at a quiet place near a lake where people rarely went. It felt right—peaceful, away from noise, a place meant for honesty. As the day approached, his nervousness grew heavier.

He didn't know how she would react once he opened up. Would she understand? Or would this moment end everything? He prepared himself for both outcomes, though his heart silently prayed for the better one.

The day arrived warm and bright under the sun. They explored the place together, visiting a temple first, then walking along a newly built path beside the lake. The air felt gentle, almost comforting. Then, unexpectedly, rain began to fall—soft at first, then steady. Instead of ruining the moment, it made everything feel more alive, more real.

That was when Rudra finally found his voice. His words came slowly at first, heavy with hesitation, then poured out with the weight he had been carrying for so long. He spoke about his past—the relationship that had shattered his trust, the nights he felt empty, the way it had changed him. He admitted how fear still lived inside him, how it stopped him from believing in, how it made him doubt himself even now.

Then his voice softened.

He told her about *her*—about how she had unknowingly become important to him. How her presence brought him peace he didn't remember asking for. How her smile felt like warmth after a long. He confessed that being with her scared him, not because of who she was, but because of how deeply he felt connected to her. He was afraid of caring this much again, afraid of losing something he hadn't even fully allowed himself to have.

As he spoke, his heart raced, every word leaving him exposed and vulnerable. Adira remained silent, listening with complete attention. She didn't interrupt or rush him. That quiet made him nervous, his chest tightening with every passing second. He wondered if he had said too much, if he had revealed more than he should have.

But even in her silence, he felt seen.

Evening came quietly. The rain slowed. The sky softened. Adira stood up first, as if to leave, and Rudra hesitated. He insisted her to ride. Fear held him back—fear of rejection, fear of hoping too much. He sat there, keeping a small distance, his thoughts racing.

Then something inside him shifted. Before his fear could stop him, he reached out and wrapped his arms around her, pulling her into a gentle hug. It was firm yet tender, filled with everything he couldn't say aloud. Time seemed to pause. He could feel the warmth of her palm against him, grounding him, calming him.
In that silence, Adira whispered softly, almost like a secret meant only for the moment.

"I like you."

The words were simple. Quiet. Honest.

But they stole his breath.

His heart raced, his mind stilled, and for the first time in a long while, he didn't feel afraid. In that moment, he understood. Everything had changed. Not because of a grand confession or dramatic promise, but because of truth spoken gently.

Adira had opened her heart in the simplest way possible—and Rudra, at last, allowed himself to feel it all.

This wasn't fleeting.
This wasn't accidental.

This was something real.
Something worth holding onto.

11. Privileges

The bond between Rudra and Adira was never announced. It didn't need to be.

Inside the office, it lived in restraint—in glances that lasted a fraction longer than professionalism allowed, in smiles that arrived before either of them could stop them. Their conversations stayed ordinary on the surface, but their phones told another story. Messages sent with trembling thumbs. Replies read too quickly, then reread slowly, as if each word carried weight. Mid office hours, while screens glowed and deadlines loomed, their hearts were quietly elsewhere—pounding, betraying them.

They spoke without speaking. A look across the room. A raised eyebrow. A half-smile meant only for one person.

Jayesh noticed.

He noticed the way Adira's attention shifted. The way Rudra's presence seemed to soften her edges. Envy crept into him silently, the kind that doesn't shout but settles heavily in the chest. He didn't confront them. He didn't need to. Some truths announce themselves without words.

Outside the office, the bond grew bolder.

Adira and Rudra began leaving separately—one after the other—timed just enough to avoid suspicion, yet close enough to promise something waiting. They met at a small distance from the office, pretending coincidence, pretending it was nothing. Two bikes. Two helmets. Two hearts racing louder than the engines beneath them.

They rode together for a while before parting ways, stealing moments on roads that became sacred simply because they were shared. Their routes had names now. There was the *"barish vali chai"* route—the one that belonged to rain and warmth and that first unexpected moment when the sky opened up and they had nowhere to rush. Wet roads, steam rising from paper cups, laughter mixed with shivers. That route smelled like earth and beginnings.

There was the *regular route*—safe, predictable, chosen on days when courage felt scarce and the world felt too watchful.

And then there was *Sukoon*.

The route where they slowed down.
The route where silence didn't ache.
The route where they could finally breathe.

On Sukoon, helmets came off earlier. Conversations deepened. Confessions slipped out unintentionally. Here, they weren't Rudra and Adira from the office. They were just two people admitting, without saying it outright, that being together felt like relief. Like rest. Like coming home to a version of themselves they hadn't known was missing.

They never said *this is love*.
They never said *what are we doing*.

But every pounding heartbeat, every stolen ride, every secret glance said it for them.

And somewhere between rain-soaked chai, quiet envy, and the calm of Sukoon, they both understood the same frightening truth:

This was no longer something they could hide from themselves—even if the world still hadn't caught on.

12. Declaration

There was a time… when they both loosened their guard.
Not all at once. Not with grand confessions or dramatic declarations.
But in the quiet way people do when trust arrives gently, without force.
It happened somewhere between silences that felt safe and conversations that didn't demand pretending.

That day , Adira spoke. Not the surface version of her story—the one people hear and forget. The real one. She unfolded her past like an old letter kept hidden too long, fragile at the edges, heavy with memory. Her voice was soft, but every word carried weight. And then she took him there. To the place where THEY MEET REGULARILY.

The spot where Adira and her Y had once met—where time had once felt different, where innocence had lived before life complicated everything. The air around that place still held echoes, as if the ground remembered what her heart had tried so hard to bury. Her eyes lingered there, distant and trembling. "This," she seemed to say without fully saying it, "is where I became who I am." Rudra listened. He didn't interrupt. He didn't try to fix it. He simply stayed. And that was its own kind of comfort.

Then, for the first time, he opened his world too. Rudra was not someone who offered pieces of himself easily. His life was built with walls, carefully stacked, brick by brick, over years of surviving quietly.
But that day… He showed her something dear. He brought her to a barren land.At first glance, it looked like nothing—just dry earth, open sky, emptiness stretching wide. But to Rudra, it was not empty. It was his.

The only thing he had saved through years of struggle, sacrifice, and patience. A future he had protected silently, even when he had no one to share it with. He stood there, looking at the land as if it were more than soil. As if it were hope. "This is my plan," his silence spoke.
"My someday." And Adira understood. Because sometimes the most meaningful things are not beautiful yet. They are unfinished. They are waiting. In that barren place, something unspoken passed between them. She had shown him her past. He had shown her his future.

And in that exchange, they weren't just two people spending time together anymore. They were two souls allowing each other into spaces that had always been kept locked.

It was something meaningful. Not because it was perfect…But because it was real. Because both of them, in their own way, were saying:
This is me. This is where I've been. This is where I want to go.
And for the first time, neither of them felt alone in it.

Later that day, they decided to go watch a movie together.

The first choice had been brutal—raw violence, unforgiving scenes that rattled the nerves. Adira, delicate and soft by nature, could barely bear it. She flinched, recoiled, and yet her gentle closure of her eyes and quiet withdrawal became almost a casual signal, a silent way of coping. He noticed, but didn't comment. He simply let her be, learning more about her in the small, fragile gestures than any words could convey.

Another movie some another day—this time, something drawn from a book she had devoured long ago, a story that had lived inside her imagination. Her eyes sparkled with anticipation, excitement radiating from her like the first embers of a hidden fire.

And then came his request—subtle, yet charged with intention. He wanted to see her in a sleeveless top.

Deep inside, she wanted it—more than she admitted even to herself. Yet the world outside, with its rules and eyes, pressed against her desire. A silent struggle tore through her heart: one part of her burned to surrender, to feel the intoxicating thrill of being exactly what he wanted. The other part—fragile, guarded, bound by her own unspoken limits—held firm. She stopped herself. Though every fiber of her longed to give in, she refused. Not with argument, not with force—just with a quiet, resolute *no* that carried the weight of all she had chosen to protect.

She had arrived in a full-sleeve top, careful, measured, as if guarding herself from the world. But once inside the theater's washroom, she allowed herself a small rebellion.
With trembling hands and a racing heart, she changed into the sleeveless top she had been craving to wear, the one she had imagined putting on but had resisted until now.

The mirror reflected a version of herself she rarely allowed anyone to see—stunning, radiant, utterly breathtaking, yet still delicately shy. There was a fire in her cheeks, a soft hesitation in her smile, a mixture of pride and vulnerability that made her appear almost ethereal.

Unable to resist capturing the moment, he clicked a few bold pictures, each one a small defiance, a quiet celebration of herself. In the shutter's click, she felt both daring and protected, knowing these images were hers alone—for now—until she chose to share them.

Every glance at her reflection was a whisper of a desire she had long kept hidden, and now it pulsed freely, fierce yet fragile, ready to meet the world—or perhaps, only him.

They entered the theater. The movie began. The air conditioning, cold and relentless, created little shivers across her skin. She tried to fight it, but the cold traced her body in ways that made her acutely aware of her own vulnerability.

He noticed immediately. Without question, without hesitation, he reached for her. Small, careful, protective. His presence enveloped her. The warmth of his hands, the subtle pressure as he guided her closer, offered her comfort.

Then, without thinking, without announcement, her hand found his. It was not tentative. It was not playful. It was deliberate, heavy with meaning. That unknown, unspoken grip—her hand in his—was her final declaration of agreement. Her consent, silent but absolute. Her way of saying, *I trust you. I am yours, here, now, in this moment.*

And in that quiet surrender, everything changed. The movie continued on the screen, but neither of them needed to watch it. They had already entered a story far more intimate, far more dangerous, and far more real.

Rudra had started to unfold in ways even he didn't fully recognize.
It wasn't sudden, not loud, not dramatic—just… real. Like a door that had been locked for too long finally creaking open, letting light slip in. He spoke more now. He stayed longer in conversations. And most of all, he began to introduce Adira into spaces that weren't just casual corners of his life.

When he introduced her to his friend, it wasn't for permission. It wasn't for approval. It was something quieter, deeper. An agreement.

A silent declaration that she was not just someone passing through, but someone who could belong. Someone who already did.

And then, like he was stepping into unfamiliar bravery, he did something he had never done before. He invited her to meet his family. Not impulsively. Not loosely. Properly.

He planned it like a script he had rehearsed in his head—where to sit, what to say, how long to stay, what smile to wear. It was almost endearing, the way he tried to control something that was, by nature, vulnerable.

Adira arrived with one of Rudra's friends beside her, as if the presence of another person might keep her nerves from spilling over.
But nerves are stubborn things. The moment she stepped inside, the air felt heavier. Warmer. Full of unfamiliar eyes. His mother was there.
His sister too. They weren't unkind, not at all—but kindness doesn't erase fear. Adira hesitated before sitting down, her movements careful, almost fragile, like she was afraid of taking up too much space.

Her hands rested awkwardly in her lap. Her heart did not beat. It raced.

For a moment, she forgot how to breathe properly. The room blurred slightly around the edges, and she could hear her own pulse louder than the soft sounds of the house.

Then came conversation. Small at first. A question. A nod. A gentle reply. And slowly—so slowly she barely noticed—it began to cool.

The tension softened. The breath returned. The world steadied.
Rudra didn't say much, but his presence spoke for him. The way he stayed near, the way his eyes flickered toward her as if silently asking, Are you okay? More than she thought she could be.

Dinner passed in a quiet rhythm—plates clinking, voices rising and falling, the normalcy of family wrapping itself around her like something unfamiliar but not unwelcome.

When it was over, Rudra's friend led the way back, guiding her out into the night. The goodbye wasn't dramatic.
Just a gentle ending to a moment that meant more than anyone said aloud.

And as she stepped out, the air outside felt different. Cooler.

But inside her chest, something warm had begun to settle.
Because tonight wasn't just a dinner. It was a doorway which Rudra had opened it for her.

13. Freshers

The bond between them grew into something fearless.
Shyness—once a constant companion—slowly stepped aside, as if it understood it was no longer needed.

There was a fresher's party coming up nearby. Adira had bought an outfit for it—or rather, two. She couldn't decide between them, and for the first time, the confusion wasn't hers alone. She wanted Rudra's opinion. Not out of insecurity, but out of intimacy. His approval mattered now, in a way that felt personal, intentional.

For Rudra, this was more than choosing a dress.
He didn't just want her presence anymore—he wanted *to see her*. Not the composed, professional Adira from office corridors, but the unfiltered version. The one she only allowed when she felt safe.

Half-joking, half-hoping, he asked for a fashion show. A video call. Her changing in front of him.

It was bold.
Too bold—for the world she came from.

Adira hesitated. She was shy with everyone else. Her instincts told her to pull back. But the barrier between them had thinned so much that resistance felt heavier than trust. After a few gentle pushes, a few reassurances wrapped in laughter and warmth, she agreed.

Evening arrived like a held breath.

She set everything up. The dresses lay neatly prepared. The call connected.

She appeared first in her home outfit—simple, familiar, comforting. Then she picked up the first dress: a top and skirt. She turned away briefly, changed, came back into frame. Rudra smiled, genuinely. It suited her, but something in him remained unsettled. This wasn't it. He knew it, and so did she.

Then came the one-piece.

She disappeared from the frame again, heart racing louder than her thoughts. When she returned, the air between them changed.

The dress looked as if it had been made for her—every line, every curve held gently, confidently. It revealed more than she was used to, and it showed. Her excitement flickered with fear. Her posture was half-proud, half-protective. She smiled, unsure, eyes searching his face for reassurance.

Rudra forgot how to breathe.

This was the first time he saw her like this—not through imagination, not through stolen glances, but real. Present. Trusting him with a version of herself the world had never seen. The moment wasn't loud or reckless. It was intense in its stillness. Emotional. Honest.

He didn't exaggerate.
He didn't pretend.

He simply told her the truth.

That it was beautiful.
That *she* was.

The one-piece was chosen—not because it was revealing, but because it felt right to both of them. It held the quiet agreement they were forming.

When the call ended, neither of them moved for a while.

Their hearts were pounding—not with desire alone, but with the realization that they had crossed another invisible line. And this time, neither of them wanted to step back.

The day of the show arrived quietly—but inside them, nothing was calm.

Rudra took his bike and stopped a little distance away from her home, at the place they had agreed on. He waited, helmet in hand, heart restless.

When Adira appeared, time seemed to slow. She came wrapped in her scarf, the black one-piece hidden beneath it like a secret only he knew. That sight alone stirred something deep—pride, desire, protectiveness—all colliding at once.

They rode together, talking continuously, words tumbling over each other as if silence might expose too much. The gap between them on the bike thinned naturally, unconsciously. Somewhere between a laugh and a shared pause, Adira looked at him and said softly that he looked *"Handome"*—effortlessly attractive—in plain shirts.

The compliment hit him harder than he expected.

Instinctively, almost nervously, Rudra asked her to keep a little distance. Not because he didn't want her close—but because he wanted control. And he could feel it slipping.

On the road, they crossed paths with Santosh—Adira's boss. A man who had crossed lines before. A pervert glance lingered on them both. Santosh said nothing. Adira didn't react. But Rudra did. Something tightened in his chest. His jaw clenched. In that moment, it wasn't jealousy—it was possession mixed with restraint.

The party began slow. Music low. Energy scattered. As the DJ grew louder, the atmosphere thickened. Rudra moved carefully, balancing himself between his seniors' circle and the interns' group. He wasn't a party person. He never had been. But tonight demanded more awareness than comfort.

Dinner arrived like a pause they both needed.

Being vegetarian, Rudra secured a quiet corner table. Adira sat beside him, naturally, as if there had never been another option. He was known for his composure—professional, controlled, unreadable. But the night betrayed him.

Without meaning to, his eyes wandered.

Stole.

Returned.

Her thick, beautiful thighs—held so confidently by his one hand strongly gripped for few seconds. The sensation was electric and unfamiliar. He felt it everywhere. Adira noticed. She pretended not to. But her stillness spoke otherwise. Something in her posture whispered: *let's leave… let's be alone… just us.*

They didn't say it.

But they both felt it.

After dinner and the group photoshoot, they left together—taking a route neither of them recognized. Not because they were lost, but because neither wanted to go home. He rode to a place he knew—safe, quiet, familiar -- a lake side view. Being out so late, away from expectations, felt thrilling for both of them.

With her favorite drink—tea—in her hands, Adira looked genuinely happy. Content. Free.

She was stunning in the one-piece, but the night had stolen his chance to really see her. So he asked—almost demanded—a short walk. A private fashion show. She resisted briefly, then gave in. She always did—with him.

Under the dim lights, she walked.

And he finally saw her.

Not just the dress. Not just the curves. But the confidence growing inside her. She looked breathtaking. And for once, she didn't hide from that truth.

They left again. This time, he let her ride the bike. Rudra followed beside her, watching, smiling to himself. A beautiful girl riding next to him. The moment felt unreal.

But something remained unresolved.

Without thinking—without planning—he reached out and hugged her from behind. His arm wrapped firmly around her belly. Strong. Protective. Certain.

The touch startled them both.

It wasn't gentle curiosity. It was need held back by restraint. It made them uneasy—not because it was wrong, but because it awakened something they couldn't ignore anymore.

Neither asked for more.
Neither pulled away immediately.

They just stayed there—hearts racing, breath uneven—knowing that whatever this was, it was no longer something they could walk away from unchanged.

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They rode like that—close, careful, aware of the world watching but certain no one could truly see *this*. The city passed by like a blur, irrelevant to the small universe they had created between two moving bikes and two beating hearts.

Soon, her home appeared. Reality returned with it.

They prepared themselves in silence. The weight of what they had shared settled gently, sweet and heavy all at once. He stopped in front of her house—standing there for the first time, realizing how close he now was to a part of her life that had once felt unreachable.

He dropped her there. Not just physically—but emotionally.

With a night folded into memory.
With warmth lingering long after touch had ended.
With moments that would return to them unexpectedly—on quiet rides, in office glances, in pauses between conversations.

They didn't say much goodbye. They didn't need to.

What they carried with them was already enough to last far beyond the night.

14. The Question

After their last meeting, something shifted—
boundaries didn't break, they **thinned**. Like glass warmed by breath.

Their regular hangout places became *Jaiswal* and *Tik Tac*, cafés that quietly memorized their laughter, their silences, the way they always chose the same corner table without deciding.
As their bond grew stronger, she found herself growing softer around him. More open. More real.

Whether emotionally or physically, she was different near him.
Her shoulders relaxed. Her voice changed. Her thoughts leaned toward him without permission.

She began expecting something more—unsaid, hidden, terrifying to speak aloud. A truth that hovered between them, heavy and electric.

That day, like always, they were lost in casual talk at the café. Words came and went easily, until holding hands stopped feeling like a moment and started feeling like a habit. Normal. Dangerous.

But then—his touch changed.

He looked at her, not casually this time. Not as a friend. Something in his eyes *asked* before his lips ever could. He gently placed his palm against her cheek, slow, deliberate—as if giving her time to pull away.

She didn't. She melted.
Like ice cream on a sunny day—no resistance, no strength left to pretend.

And in that fragile, trembling silence, when her heartbeat was louder than the café around them, he finally asked the question.

The one she had been silently begging him to ask all along.

15. Moments Shared

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16 . Realization

The line between them had already thinned—so fine it no longer felt like a boundary at all.

What they shared continued quietly, deliberately, unseen by others. No declarations, no announcements. Just an understanding acknowledged only to themselves. A bond that didn't need witnesses to exist. It lived in messages sent with careful timing, in thoughts that returned uninvited, in the comfort of knowing someone was there—always there.

Then Diwali arrived. The festival of light. Ironically, it brought shadows with it.

She knew her limits. She knew her brother. In his presence, she believed she could not meet him, could not speak to him, could not even chat. Silence was supposed to be her duty. Distance was meant to be enforced. She prepared herself for restraint, for absence, for doing the *right* thing.

She thought she could stop.
But the bond did not listen to rules.

It pressed forward, quietly defiant. Her resolve weakened. Her views collapsed one by one. Every attempt to pull back failed—not because she didn't try, but because what connected them had grown stronger than fear. They talked. Through lights and rituals, through family noise and stolen moments, they
talked.

One day passed. Then another. Even on the second day of Diwali,
when she believed silence should have won, the connection refused to fade.
It stayed. Not loud. Not reckless. Just persistent.

And somewhere between glowing lamps and unspoken risks, a question began to form—slow, heavy, unavoidable.

This was good. Too good.

So now, standing at the edge of this fragile happiness,
with warmth still lingering and uncertainty knocking softly, only one thought remains unanswered:

Will this fragile happiness be given time to live—
or is fate already closing in, preparing to tear apart what their hearts dared to believe could survive?

Chapter 2 :

The Devastating Mid

"...laayak tere kive hova tu dass mainu"

1. Where It All Began

Diwali, the festival of lights, arrived softly…

Once, not too long ago, their words had been unstoppable. They spoke as if silence didn't exist, as if time itself could pause just to listen to them. But lately… something felt missing.

Adira carried doubts, Her brother being nearby made her cautious. Rudra noticed her hesitation, and though it pained him, he tried to understand. He thought of her situation, of the walls around her life, and made up his mind to be patient. And then… unexpectedly, she held on. Not for long, perhaps, but enough.

They started talking again—with stolen minutes, hurried whispers, and a sweetness that felt almost forbidden.

Day one passed. Day two passed. And Rudra couldn't help but think…Even though it's scary… she's still here. She's still talking. Maybe… we're okay. But ahead of them, unseen, a dark cloud was forming.

After just two days of Diwali, something shifted. Adira, who once spent hours wrapped in conversation, now spoke less. Her presence became scarce. Rudra told himself it must be her circumstances. Maybe her family was tightening its grip again. Maybe life was pulling her away.

Once, video calls were common. Calls, texts, laughter—they were effortless. Now… even a simple message came after long pauses, broken silences, irregular replies.

The warmth between them started feeling distant, unfamiliar.

There was a time when Rudra tried taking a break…and Adira had been the one to approach first, refusing to let him slip away.

But this time… she didn't. The air between them wasn't the same.

Rudra, a deep thinker, noticed every small change .He wanted to give her space, to let her breathe, believing it might just be family trouble.

Days passed. Then a week. Their online time, the time after office—once a road leading home together— turned into a lonely path for Rudra. Adira began ghosting him.

And slowly, the disturbance inside him grew heavier. His patience, once endless, started running out. Finally, one day… he couldn't hold it in anymore. He confronted her.
"What happened?"
"What happened to us?"
"What is the matter?"
"Did I do something wrong… or is this something from your side?"

His voice carried frustration, but beneath it was fear. Fear of losing something he had started to believe in. He remembered the time Adira had almost cried in front of him, speaking of her family troubles. He had rushed to meet her, even when it wasn't feasible, even when the reach was difficult. Still… he was there.

Now, standing before her with a slight frown, anger masking his pain, he asked again—Expecting an answer…Expecting her to not disappear… You cannot stop the heart from trembling when the person you hold close begins to fade into silence.

When she spoke, her voice didn't carry haste anymore. It carried weight. The kind of weight that sits on the chest at night, the kind that makes even the simplest words tremble. And then… she disclosed her dark.
Her family had started searching. Not gently. Not slowly. But seriously.

A life partner. The man for her future.

Conversations had already begun. The word had spread like wildfire through relatives, aunties, whispered phone calls, family meetings.
Adira wasn't just thinking about marriage anymore. Marriage was thinking about her.

And then there was one boy. Harshad. A name that entered her life like an uninvited guest .He wasn't someone from her world… yet suddenly, he was everywhere in it. Following up. Showing interest. Becoming a topic.

She described him, almost mechanically, as if speaking about him would make him less real.

A boy slightly short in height. A distinct smile. Neither too fair nor too dark. A small out belly, barely noticeable. Rich—financially, socially. The only child of his family, pampered beyond measure. A boy deeply tied to his mother, held close by comfort and connection.

And Adira…Adira was afraid. Afraid of the situation tightening around her. So she restricted herself. Pulled back.

As if silence could delay destiny.

Rudra's angry face faded instantly. He hadn't imagined, it would come this early. He stood there, caught between shock and helplessness. Words failed him. And silence… became exhausting.

Adira continued, her voice softer now, almost breaking. "His mother and my mother… they talk a lot. They interact well." That sentence alone carried a warning. This might lead somewhere…somewhere she didn't want. Rudra felt himself loosen, unravel.

Rudra this side, could not console her, could not fight with her, could not even properly interpret the situation .

All he managed was a fragile suggestion—
"**Let time pass…and please… don't restrain yourself from sharing your frightening thoughts**."

Because what else could he do? When life begins arranging your replacement, love becomes painfully powerless.

2. The Trip

Then came the trip.

For the first time, Adira travelled with her cousins. A tour—seven or eight people, laughter, couples included. Her excitement shone through her eyes. She smiled more, clicked pictures, breathed freedom.

But somewhere between the joy…she noticed the couples. Two people walking side by side. Hands brushing. Quiet comfort.

And without meaning to…Rudra crossed her mind. Like a soft ache. The tour felt beautiful…yet the gap it created felt like a valley.

At night, under a sky scattered with shooting stars, she called him. Not because she had something urgent to say…but because she missed him. Because some silences become unbearable when you're away from the person who feels like home. Her voice that night was tender.

Next day again, she called him, She asked, almost like a child asking for reassurance— "When I come back… will you give me your time?" She wanted to spend time with him. Like they did before the world complicated everything.

Rudra, on the other hand, wasn't expecting this. He had been disturbed by the growing distance, confused by her disappearance.

But maybe…this meeting could fill the gap.

She had been on the trip for almost ten days. Ten days of laughter, cousins, new places…ten days where enjoyment came in waves—
but tiredness, that quiet companion, could never truly be hidden.

3. Crossing Tides

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4. Twitches

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5. Uninvited Comeback

And for a moment, things felt normal. A fragile normal.

Days passed. And then—Harshad wasn't the only name anymore.
Another boy approached. Another proposal. Another possibility.

Now there were two. Two paths. Two families. Two futures.

Adira's life was turning into a crowded room where her own heart barely had space to breathe.

A meeting with Harshad's family was arranged. Everything looked good. Smiles. Formalities. Approval. And yet…with every step her family took forward, the distance between Rudra and Adira increased. Not because bond vanished…but because life was closing in.

The situation with Harshad was no longer a distant possibility. It was becoming real. Family visits began. Introductions happened more often. Smiles were exchanged, tea was served, questions were asked as if her life was already being decided in living rooms she couldn't escape. This was the time Adira struggled the most.

She tried—softly, carefully—to mention her no to her mother. But her mother's question came like a blade wrapped in concern:
"Why don't you start giving in?"

And Adira…Adira couldn't answer.

How could she? How could she speak of Rudra when her feelings felt like a secret too fragile to survive daylight?

Maybe it was doubt. Maybe it was fear. Maybe it was the terrifying thought of confrontation. So she stayed quiet.

With no good feeling in her heart, she let things happen.
Not because she wanted them…
but because she didn't know how to stop them.
And Rudra…Rudra was becoming numb.

He couldn't think clearly. He couldn't ask. He couldn't even demand. He just existed in a silence that kept growing heavier. His family had once told him—"Prepare. Clear the exam. Build your future." Rudra was always study-oriented. Practical too. He knew competition was brutal. He had never truly attempted with his full soul before.

But this time…it was different. This time, it wasn't just an exam.
It was her.

He looked at himself and thought bitterly—"I am no good like Harshad… in anything." And yet, something inside him whispered—**Try**. Maybe this could be his chance. Maybe he could stand in front of her family one day, not as a boy in the background…but as a man worthy of being chosen.

Days passed. The gap widened. Months slipped away. Four… five…

And then, strangely, Adira started entering again. How? Why?
He didn't know. She came like a familiar breeze—and disappeared like smoke. As if it was her own call to arrive and leave whenever she wanted.

Rudra craved her words. He craved closure. But it felt suspicious. Sudden. Unstable. Then he heard—The matter with Harshad was not yet finalized. Rudra breathed. Relief, sharp and trembling, filled his chest. He watched cautiously. He talked carefully. Because hope, once broken, becomes fragile.

It had been almost six months since they were truly them—talking, walking, sharing life like before. And then…within a few days…
the news came. A ceremony. A confirmation.

One word that crushed everything. Rudra's world shattered. He was in the middle of office lunch when he saw it—Adira's picture.
With Harshad.

The ceremony was short…but the program was big. Big enough to announce what his heart had feared all along. It hit him deeper than anyone could expect.

His throat tightened. His eyes burned. He was about to cry in the middle of strangers, holding himself together only because the world does not pause for heartbreak.

And Adira…Adira too was threatened inside. Standing there, surrounded by people calling it happiness…she felt trapped. Her smile didn't reach her soul. And at the end of the ceremony…she wept. Quietly.

Because sometimes, the loudest celebrations hide the deepest mourning.

Two hearts breaking in two different places—
One watching a picture…One living inside it

6. Birth A Day

Days passed…

And Adira and Rudra began talking again. Not like the old days, when words flowed without fear,when silence never dared to enter between them. Now, their conversations carried a strange maturity—
a quiet heaviness. They spoke as if walking barefoot on glass,
careful not to bleed, careful not to break what was already fragile.

There was a line between them. Invisible. Unspoken. And yet both of them could feel it, like a wall made of air, harder to cross than stone. Still… they maintained it. Because sometimes love doesn't end suddenly—it fades slowly, with discipline ,with helplessness.

Her birthday was nearby. And Rudra remembered something. Months ago, Adira had seen a watch on the wrist of her colleague. Her eyes had lit up instantly, the way they used to light up around him. She couldn't hide her excitement. It wasn't just admiration. It was longing.

A small, innocent wish. And Rudra…he noticed. Quietly.

He didn't say much then, but later, alone with his thoughts, he marked it in his cart. Back then, it was simply a watch. But now…Now it had become the watch.

Last birthday, he had given her something she had chosen herself-scandal. Rudra never liked surprises. He believed bond was safer when it was certain, when gifts were not guesses, but understandings.

And this time too…he wanted to give her something known. Something she truly wanted. Because the matter between them was already hard enough. She had no time for him. No space.
And the outside world…it wasn't allowing her to provide any either.
Still, Rudra held on to this one small thing—Her birthday.

A moment where he could give her happiness, even if only for a second.
So he purchased it two days before. With only one thought in his heart:
Maybe I will see that sparkle in her eyes again.

Then, one day before her birthday…he heard the news.

Harshad was coming. Disturbance spread through him like poison. Suddenly, his gift felt smaller. Not because it was less… but because bond, when competing with obligation, always feels like it will lose.

He thought—
What if my watch becomes nothing in front of his gifts?
What if she sees mine as envy… jealousy… desperation?

So, to calm himself, he did something strange. He shared the receipt with her before giving the gift. An undisclosed receipt. As if he was trying to prove—This is not a surprise. This is not pressure. This is only care.

But deeper than that…it was his own agreement with fate. A line he drew for himself: When Harshad is near…Rudra will not be. So he waited. Days passed.

And then he heard something that broke him quietly. She had received gifts equal to her age. Who does that? Childish, perhaps…yet also a clever way to make someone fall. To make someone feel celebrated.
To make someone feel chosen.

Rudra realized then—His gift would be just one more on the shelf.
Not special. Not unforgettable. Just… another box. Another formality.
Then the day came. Almost unknowingly, he met her.T here was no sweetness. No birthday warmth. It began with a frown. Nothing happy-happy. Rudra spoke first. Then again. Questions, one after another.
Trying to reach her. Trying to understand.

But Adira…she didn't respond. Not fully. Not the way he needed.

And then…mid-conversation…her phone rang. She attended the call.
Right there. As if he wasn't standing in front of her with his heart open.
That moment…Rudra felt something collapse.

Like the matter was no more. Like he was no more. He asked her about something that was his. The notes she had made. The questionnaire.
A small piece of connection he wanted to hold.

And then…he gave her the watch. She resisted. Didn't take it immediately.

No smile. No glimpse of happiness. Only subtle silence. A silence louder than rejection.

Rudra stood there, feeling worthless—Not just of the gift…
but of all the time he had spent trying. Trying to stay. Trying to matter.

Then she said, quietly—"The notes are deleted." That was the only thing he asked for. And even that…was gone.

With disappointment heavy in his chest, he left. Sorrow in his heart. A kind of sorrow that doesn't scream— it just sinks. And then…the next day…he saw her. Showing the gift to her colleagues. With a happy face. Smiling.
As if it was normal. As if it was nothing.

Rudra stood far away, frozen. And he told himself softly— Thinking that Maybe she didn't process it at that moment…

Now the talks between them became formal. Not empty…but controlled. Like two people holding cups of hot tea with trembling hands, afraid of spilling what they truly feel.

Rudra convinced himself slowly—I am no longer required. Not in her life. Not in her future. Not in the plans being written around her. So he started maintaining distance. Cold replies. Short texts.

A deliberate calmness. But inside…inside he was still the same boy
who felt a sudden rush of happiness just from the glimpse of her name on his notification bar.

Even when he acted distant…his heart still jumped. That contradiction was exhausting. Adira noticed the shift. She felt it immediately.

The warmth that once stayed even in silence was now turning into withdrawal. And she recoiled. Not in anger. In fear. Because losing someone slowly hurts .

This time, she didn't disappear. This time, with maturity…she spoke.
Her voice wasn't defensive. It was honest. She explained—Her silence was not negligence. It was not carelessness. It was survival. A way to protect herself from being overwhelmed. From feelings too large, from situations too tight, from love that felt beautiful and dangerous at the same time.

"This is how I am," she admitted softly. Not as an excuse…but as a truth.

Then she spoke about the gift. She liked it. Truly. She had flaunted it in front of many. She had smiled. Not because she wanted to hurt him…but because she genuinely liked it.

And somewhere in her eyes, regret sat quietly. She expressed sorrow for deleting the notes. A small thing, perhaps…but to Rudra, it was never small. Because those notes were proof that something between them once mattered. That moment…was itself mature. It wasn't a reunion. It wasn't a promise. It wasn't a forever. But it was honesty.

And sometimes, when life cannot give love…it gives understanding.

Even if they could not share a life…they could share this moment.
A partial relief. A fragile peace. Like two souls standing in the same rain, not together…but no longer pretending they were strangers.

7. Endeavors

Time before, She tried once…casually, almost like she was speaking about the weather. As if the truth inside her wasn't shaking.

"Maa… there is a guy in my office," she said softly.
"A nice one. He helps me… guides me… understands me.
He wants to be a part of my future."

Who in this world asks so straight? Who dares to place their heart on the table like that, in front of a mother who has already imagined a different life?

Adira's voice was calm…but inside her, everything was trembling.

Her mother listened. Paused. And then the answer came—not loud, not cruel…just firm. Unconvinced. A reminder wrapped in experience.
A reminder of herself.

"You cannot proceed like this," her mother said.

And Adira felt it—that invisible wall again. The one that doesn't allow love to speak freely. Days passed.

And Harshad started entering more. His name appeared more often in conversations. His family's presence grew stronger. Visits. Introductions. Expectations. Everything began to feel… wrong. Like she was watching her own life being arranged by hands that were not hers.

She tried. God, she tried. She tried convincing her family. Softly first. Then more clearly.

But she was not successful. Every attempt to cover the truth, to delay the inevitable, to escape politely…was in vain. Nothing was in control. And no one could understand. How could they? To them, she was saying no to Harshad. A simple no.

But they didn't know the real sentence inside her heart—She wasn't just saying no to him…She needed to say yes only to Rudra. And that yes…was trapped.

Unspoken. Unaccepted. Unallowed.

Everything felt like it was slipping. Like sand through fingers. Hopeless. Because when you are surrounded by people deciding your future, even love starts feeling helpless…and the heart begins to lose not because it stops loving—but because it realizes, it may never get chosen.

Inside all of this…Rudra was waiting.

Not for a miracle. Not for her family to suddenly soften. Just for one moment…a moment where he could at least stand in front of them. Face them. Exist, not as a shadow in Adira's life, but as a man who could ask.

He knew the truth. He was not rich. No social connections. No luxurious life. Even their caste was different.

He considered interview. Another switch. But that much would not fill in.

In her family's world, acceptance was not built on feelings. It was built on status, security, familiarity. And logically…there was no scope for him. No space. No opening.

Except one thing—his wish to have Adira as his life-partner. That was all he had.

And he knew it wasn't enough. But still…he wanted to try. Just one step. Because even if it failed, he didn't want to live with the regret of never attempting. He didn't want to say one day— "I loved her… but I did nothing."

So he chose the only path that felt practical. The only ladder he could climb. He started studying. Not for his own field. Not because it was his passion. But for a government exam. Because in a world like hers… a government job was not just employment.

It was respect. Stability. A reason her family might listen to. In the office, people thought Rudra was deeply engaged in work. Focused. Disciplined. They didn't know…he was carrying another life quietly beside it. A life of books, late nights, pressure. He was contributing toward study apart from his work field. He even took leave. Quietly Studying.

Without telling Adira. Hidden up to the result. Not because he didn't trust her…but because hope is fragile.

If he spoke too early, it would feel like a promise. And promises are dangerous when you are unsure of winning. He was trying in disguise.

Because he knew—this might be his last chance. If this failed…
there would be no way left. No logical step remaining. No respectable argument to place before her family. And he could not imagine keeping Adira in his life only as a memory.

He was intelligent though. He knew it. But competition always kept him aside. It always made him doubt himself. Yet this time…it wasn't about ego. It wasn't about achievement. It was about Adira. So he forced himself. He had to do it. He prepared with whatever effort he had. Then the result came.

It was not in his favor.

He scored leaving thousands of people back, but still many ahead. This was not enough. Not enough to crack it.. And Rudra was devastated.
Not just because he failed…but because of what failure meant. The consequences. The final door closing.

The last chance he had…gone.

8. Acceptance

Rudra sat with the weight of it, letting the truth settle where denial could no longer reach. Painfully, clearly, he understood—it was never an exam he had lost. It was the last logical bridge he had left, the only way he knew how to stand at the edge of her world and be seen.

And when that, too, collapsed, something inside him whispered—not in panic, but in exhaustion: *Now… what is left?*
The final attempt had failed. Logic had run out of roads. All that remained was sorrow.

He had no financial ground to stand on, no social ease, no luxury to soften life's edges. His world was simple, unadorned, and he knew—perhaps too well—that simplicity is not always enough. Either way, he was not what she deserved. He repeated it to himself like a verdict, like mercy: *It's good. It's okay. I could never give her what she should have.*

He was not a child. He was a grown man, and grown men, he believed, did not cry. They learned to step aside with dignity. They learned to be happy in the happiness of the person they loved—even when that happiness no longer included them. For her sake, he told himself. For her good.

So he consoled himself with what he called maturity. Acceptance shaped like reason. Silence shaped like strength.

On the other side, Adira told herself a different truth. That holding on would only become a quiet pressure—an unspoken demand on Rudra to ask, to need, to explain. She felt herself losing control, piece by piece, and knew she was losing too. Love does not vanish cleanly; it erodes.

Both of them carried sorrow in careful hands. Both gathered the good memories, the gentle moments, and tried to place them somewhere safe. They did not fight the ending. They accepted it—not because it hurt less, but because they believed this, too, was a form of care.

Rudra and Adira, with a strange sense of maturity, accepted what was coming. Not because it was easy…but because fighting felt impossible.

Chapter 3 :

The Beginning Of End

"..mitti da banda m, tu taan pari"

1. Only...A Little More?

They still shared texts. Still shared calls. Sometimes even video calls. But everything was measured now. Carefully kept. As if they were holding their emotions at arm's length, maintaining distance not from each other…but from their own original souls.

Rudra no longer flirted like before. And Adira no longer asked for it. Not because the desire had vanished…but because reality had placed its hand over their mouths.

Inside, somewhere deep, both of them were living an unreal version of themselves. A version that smiled without meaning. A version that spoke without revealing. A version that survived.

Days passed. Rudra continued his routine. Work. Life. Silence. He maintained space with Adira. On the outside, he was calm. On the inside, he was constantly reminding himself—Do not expect. Do not fall again.

Adira, too, tried. She tried to adjust. Tried to accept. Tried to act normal.

Rudra began treating her like others. Just…a little more. A little extra care. A little softer tone. A little presence. But for Adira…a little more was not enough. It wasn't love. It wasn't closeness. It was a leftover. And that thought disturbed her deeply.

She was having a storm inside. Waves of emotions crashing against her ribs, questions screaming within her—How could he act like this? How could she become just…a little more?

What was she to him now? A habit? A memory?

A person she couldn't fully keep but couldn't fully let go? Her anger inside raged. Not loud. Not dramatic. But burning. She kept things low, kept her voice steady…yet her face revealed everything.

Because faces cannot lie the way words do. Even though she didn't admit it…even though she acted composed… she was not liking this approach of Rudra.

She wasn't okay with being treated like everyone else. Not after everything. Not after being someone who once meant the world.

And somewhere between her silence and his distance…something unspoken was growing—A hurt that neither of them knew how to heal.

2. Storm

She held a storm inside her for days…A storm of unsaid feelings, swallowed anger, trembling longing.

And then, one day, she could not hold it anymore.

She confronted him. Not with softness. Not with patience.
But with the raw honesty of someone breaking from within.

"How can you act normal near me?" her voice shook.

"I can't. I lose myself, Rudra. I can't stay in your life as just… a little more." That phrase hurt her like a wound.

A little more. As if she was a fraction. As if she was something incomplete. She demanded justification, not because she wanted a fight… but because she wanted to know she still mattered.

Rudra, who had been standing on the edge for so long, finally slowed down. He dropped his mask. The distance he had forced, the coldness he had practiced…it cracked. And without realizing, he started giving her more.

Bit by bit. Like it was normal again. Like the old warmth was trying to return through broken doors.

Adira, subconsciously, was asking for closure. Not in words. In presence. In softness. In the way her eyes stayed on him longer than they should.

Rudra didn't fully notice at first. For him, touch was sacred. He barely let anyone touch him—not a girl, not even a boy. He lived with boundaries carved into his skin. But rules faded when Adira came close.

With the slightest touch…he felt her melting. He could see it. Her breath changing. Her eyes carrying something she didn't even dare whisper. A wanting that was louder than speech. And with his throat tight, holding everything in his hands, he asked gently…

She wanted. She did want. But… A but rose like a wall.

Professionalism. Work. For Adira, work was never just work.

It was her identity. Her survival. Her proof. She believed nothing must be compromised. Even health can but work can't. Sometimes she held work more than work held her. Peer pressure sat on her shoulders like an unforgiving weight. As if in her absence, the world would stop. No compromise.

That was it. Eventually, there came a moment… A cruel moment. A choice between deadline…and the sensation of closure. Between duty…and desire. And she chose the deadline.

Rudra felt played. Not because she was wrong…but because it made him feel less worthy. This time, he wasn't just angry. He felt small. Like love was always second in her life. Like he was always second. He didn't say it. He kept it inside. And the knot stayed within him. Tight. Unresolved. Time passed. Days. Weeks. A month.

He didn't ask. She didn't explain further.

The knot remained…until time, slowly, loosened it the way time loosens everything. And then, Adira was back. As if nothing happened.

As if storm never existed.

3. Diwali

Days passed, and Diwali arrived like a soft, glowing reminder of the year before—when the festival had opened an unexpected chapter, one threaded with sadness. This year, Adira didn't want to let anything spoil the light between her and Rudra. She wanted the day to remain pure, untouched by old pain or new misunderstandings.

She stayed in contact with him, carefully, gently—like someone walking along the edge of a fragile glass sculpture, trying not to crack it. Rudra had a habit that was both sweet and irritating: he never messaged her directly when he knew her brother or Harshad might be nearby. It was a rule he had made for himself, one he thought would protect her. But it often left her feeling distant, as if she were being kept at a polite, safe distance.

So he found a different way. A quiet workaround. He used his status updates—short messages meant only for her. A hidden conversation, almost like a secret language. He didn't expect timely reply. He didn't demand one. He simply wanted her to know she was in his thoughts.

Adira was on leave. The pooja at her home had filled her day with chores, rituals, and the steady hum of celebration. Yet she found time for him—yes, even in the middle of the rush. She stepped away from the hustle, just for a moment, and that moment was for Rudra.

They hadn't seen each other in so long. Yet today, she was coming to him. In all the silent longing, the distance was finally ending.

She arrived in her Diwali dress, slightly loose at the waist as if she'd outgrown it, as if time had gently moved on while she stayed still. The dress didn't fit her perfectly anymore, but it made her look stunning—soft, bright, real. It made her look like someone who had been through a lot but was still here, still shining.

She carried lamps and diyas—delicate, beautiful pieces, each carved with care. There were different varieties, some simple, some intricate. Among them was a sculpture diya of the gods—so delicate it seemed as if it could break at the slightest touch. She had also brought a box of dry fruits, the kind you give during Diwali as a symbol of care and abundance.

Rudra saw her and felt the weight of those delicate things in his mind. How could he carry all of this without breaking anything? How could he protect her offerings, her intentions, her heart?

And yet, he was hiding behind his own doubts. He wondered if she would really come or if this was just a hopeful illusion, he had created to soothe himself. He had prepared, just in case—his own little bucket list of gifts, scattered and unordered.

Then he decided, firmly, to make it real. To give her something she might like. Something childish. Something sweet. He brought her a Kinder Joy—because even grown girls can love a little surprise hidden inside a toy. Because she was still, at her core, a child who found joy in small wonders. He added sweets too, because it was Diwali, and sweets were a language of celebration.

She was more excited about the Kinder Joy than the sweets. Her eyes lit up with anticipation, dazzling and bright. She laughed with that innocent delight, that spark he loved so much. That spark. It was the only thing he had ever wanted from her—the sparkle in her eyes, the way her face would light up when something small and sweet surprised her.

And in that moment, he gave her another pet name. "Sparkle."

Long ago, she had been upset with him for not giving her a nickname—*not even one*. Now, over time, they had accumulated six. Half a dozen names, Each one a little more intimate than the last. Who in the world was remembered with so many names?

'Gabbu'—one she heard less often, a playful tease from him, always making her laugh. And soon, she would receive another one. A name made from only half of her real name- *her name in half- adi*. A name that would feel like belonging. A name that would feel like home.

And as she stood there, surrounded by light and warmth, with the sound of fireworks distant in the night, Rudra realized something quiet and tender:

She was still here. She was still his...Even if only for this moment.

4. The Turn

Their talks began taking a turn again. Not just casual…but something wild beneath the surface. Fantasies. Unspoken sparks. A dangerous comfort. And Adira…she was aware.

It was like any regular day…A regular end of day. Evening had settled quietly over the office, the kind of evening that feels heavier than the morning, because it carries exhaustion… and unspoken thoughts.

Rudra was supposed to be the one locking up. He always was.

And somewhere deep inside him, fantasies had lived for a long time—not reckless ones, but the kind born from closeness, from longing, from months of suppressed affection.

Adira knew he would be the last one there. And strangely…she found comfort in being the only one left too. Not because she planned anything. But because around him, even silence felt different.

Rudra had warned her earlier, softly—
"You should leave early… before it becomes hard to stay."

But Adira…Adira had never been someone who listened easily.

Not when her heart was louder than advice. One by one, everyone left. Footsteps faded. Lights dimmed. The office became quiet.
Just two souls remaining inside a building that suddenly felt too still. Work was wrapped. The day was ending.

And then Rudra messaged her—half teasing, half trembling… a reminder of those fantasies they had once spoken about in fragments. Adira saw it. Her breath caught. She didn't reply immediately. Not because she didn't feel it…but because she did.

What happened was not supposed too, at least inside office premises. He locked office doors and Adira who was coming outside of girl's washroom, he pushed her inside, a girls toilet, yes he did it.

...

They left the office quietly. Walking toward their homes. Side by side. Still silent. Not because nothing happened…but because everything did. And somewhere in that silence…their hearts were louder than ever.

They didn't go home immediately. They couldn't. The world outside felt too normal, too unchanged…while inside them, something irreversible had just shifted.

So they caught up somewhere nearby. Just to sit. Just to breathe. Just to let fresh air touch their faces, as if the night breeze could cool down the heat of what had happened.

They sat in silence at first. Not awkward silence…but the kind that comes after a storm, when even words feel unnecessary.

Adira's hands were still trembling slightly. Rudra noticed. He didn't reach for her right away. He only sat beside her, leaving space…because even closeness needed permission now.

The air was cold, but their hearts were burning. Slowly, Adira exhaled, as if she had been holding her breath for months. "This… was a lot," she whispered. Rudra nodded, his voice barely there. "I know."

The tension between them began to loosen, little by little,
like a tight knot finally given air. Above them, the night continued as if nothing had happened. Cars passed. Lights flickered. Life moved.

But for them…time had paused.

Adira looked ahead, not at him, because looking at him felt too intense.
"I was scared," she admitted softly. Rudra's chest tightened.
"That was thrilling the way she read in her books and even dreamed" he added quickly, almost urgently.

But in that moment…they allowed themselves to simply exist.

Two hearts breathing in the same air. Letting tension go out…not completely…but enough to survive the night.

5 . Rush

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6. Jealous h'

Rudra received the news suddenly, without warning, the way life delivers its sharpest turns. A call from Dev, Rudra's Friend—*your ex is getting married*. Dev was shaken, checking on Rudra, expecting something to break. But nothing did. Rudra stood still inside himself, unbothered, almost strangely at peace. He surprised even himself with how calm he felt. Happy for her, even.

He called his ex—his *X*. Their conversation was gentle, free of old weight. She spoke of a wish she had carried quietly 'to travel once' with him. Not romance, she clarified. Just togetherness. Companionship. Memory without desire.

He searched himself for old feelings and found none of the ache he once knew. What remained was simpler—gratitude. She had cared for him, once. That mattered. He agreed. They made a plan.

When he told Adira, she listened without interruption. On the surface, she was composed. Inside, something sharp rose—an unexpected heat. How could she ask him that? How could she still claim space in his life? Jealousy took shape in silence, quiet but fierce. Rudra noticed the shift. He noticed everything. And part of him—unguarded, human—enjoyed it.

The plan was laid out. Everything was said aloud. And yet, something wasn't said. Adira felt it too. She wanted to be asked. She wanted him to look at her and say *come with me*. But he didn't.

Inside, Rudra wanted to go with Adira. That truth sat heavy in him. But his answer—to himself, to the world—remained no.

One evening, riding home together on his bike, the air casual, unassuming, she teased him about the tour. He replied without thinking, half-light, half-defensive—*You won't come.*

She didn't say yes. But she didn't say no too.

7. The Plan

Something shifted. A tiny click inside him. A possibility of 1%—small, fragile—maybe one percent, but alive. He stopped the bike. Set it aside. Looked at her again, slower this time. Rechecked his understanding. She stayed silent, suspended between answers.

He didn't wait.

Quietly, deliberately, he made the plan with his X impossible. Hardened it. Complicated it. Pushed it toward collapse. And it worked. The tour with *X* was cancelled—exactly as he had planned.

Adira, meanwhile, stood at the edge of decision. Yes and no pulled at her from opposite sides. She wanted to say yes. She wanted it fiercely. But fear stood guard—family, consequences, the weight of crossing a line she had never crossed before.

She told herself this was the last chance. The *only* chance. There would never be another moment like this. Never again a space where she could be with Rudra like this—outside routine, outside rules, outside the watchful eyes of home. Fear battled desire. Desire won.

She planned carefully. Quietly. She planted the idea of an official tour at home long before it was real. Built it slowly, day by day, until it sounded ordinary. Acceptable. She repeated it until even she began to believe it.

It was a lie. Spoken for him. Spoken for herself. And it thrilled her as much as it terrified her.

As the days closed in, her heartbeat tightened. She rehearsed conversations in her head—what to say at home, what to say at the office. Everything was prepared. Her mother packed her bag —official clothes only. Crisp. Appropriate. Safe.

As if it truly were an official tour. She had never left without telling her Mum everything. Not once. The lie sat inside her mouth like something poisonous. *Official work*, she had said. Only that. Nothing more. She avoided her mother's eyes when she said it.

He picked her up early. Too early. She could see the question in his face: *Are you still coming?* even though she was carrying a Bag. Neither of them asked it. He dropped her a little away from the office. The bike slowed. Stopped.

"Go," he said softly. She nodded, even though her body didn't want to move.

Inside the office, everything looked the same. Desks. Screens. Voices. It felt wrong. Like she had already left and her body was only pretending to be here. He messaged her every hour. *You okay?*, *Still there?*

She replied because she had to. Because if she didn't, he would imagine the worst. He had failed once before. She knew that. She could hear the fear behind his calm words. It made her chest ache. Lunch time crawled closer. Then the message came. **To the Conference room.** by her Boss.

Her vision blurred. Her ears rang. For a second she couldn't feel her hands. This was it. Someone knew. She imagined her mother's face if this went wrong. The disappointment. The silence that would follow. She wanted to disappear. She messaged him with shaking fingers. He called. His voice was calm. Steady. It made her cry without tears. He told her to breathe. She tried. Air scraped her throat like it didn't belong there.

In the meeting room, she sat straight, hands folded tight enough to hurt. When the phone rang again, she answered and let her face fall apart.

"I… something's happened," she said. Her voice broke. It didn't need to be forced. "Someone in my family… collapsed." The lie burned.

Her boss watched her carefully. The room felt too small. She waited for suspicion. For questions. For everything to end. Then he nodded. "Go."

Her legs almost gave out. She sent the message to the group. Apology. Emergency. Leaving. Standing up felt like standing on a cliff. Walking out felt like jumping.

Her heart was loud now. Wild. Her breath shallow. She was terrified — not of being caught, but of the person she was becoming in this moment. A version of herself she didn't recognize.

When she crossed the office door, Her hands shook as she walked. the world tilted. She was outside. She had done it. That was all that mattered. At the bus stand, she saw him. Waiting.

The fear didn't vanish. But it softened. Just enough. They met.

And in that moment, every lie, every shaking breath, every risk felt like the price of choosing a life she had never been brave enough to touch before. Adira smiled at the irony. Somewhere between amusement and disbelief, she laughed softly at herself. *How official is this, really?*

She asked herself again and again—what am I doing? Am I really doing this? Am I planning to go away with Rudra… alone… for two whole days? Two days outside her home. Two days outside herself.

Was this courage she was finally allowing herself to claim—or recklessness, tender and dangerous, wearing the face of longing?

8. The Bus

The bus carried them quietly through the night. A sleeper coach, bottom berth. Just the two of them inside, while the world outside remained crowded with strangers, noise, movement… life. But their curtain was closed .A thin fabric, yes— yet it felt like a room of its own. A small, private space where the outside world no longer mattered. Where time softened. Where everything became quieter.

Adira wasn't feeling well. Her face held tiredness she wasn't speaking about. She shifted slowly, preparing to rest. And then, to Rudra's surprise…she leaned closer .At first, just near him. Then… against him. Her head found support on his shoulder as if it belonged there. As if her body trusted him before her mind could overthink.

Rudra's breath caught. It was such a lovely feeling—the kind of tenderness that doesn't ask for anything, the kind that simply exists. She covered herself with her scarf, curling in gently, resting. And the whole scene…it was so peaceful, so intimate in its innocence, that Rudra wanted to live inside that moment forever. Just this. Nothing more. Just her breathing beside him.

She lay like a child, legs folded, spooned into comfort, the exhaustion of the day finally surrendering. Rudra stayed still. Careful. Respectful. His heart was full, overflowing, but he maintained the line between longing and love. He adjusted her scarf softly, making sure she was covered, warm, safe. A silent gesture. A quiet devotion.

After some time, his phone rang. A friend calling—planning the journey ahead. Rudra didn't want to disturb her. He hesitated, delayed, hoping the call would end quickly. But eventually, she stirred. Realization came that it had been long. Slowly, both of them sat up.

The curtain opened slightly, and the outside world returned. They spoke with his friend—Dev—and Dev's girlfriend, Piya. A small conversation. Simple, casual.

Rudra, Adira, Dev, and Piya—
four people sharing words, while two of them carried an entire unspoken universe inside.

And after a while…they returned to their own spaces. The moment passed. The bus continued forward. They rested for a while longer.

Adira lay against him, slowly placing more and more of her weight on his shoulder, as if her body had finally decided it was safe to stop holding itself up. Completely on him.

Rudra felt it all—her warmth, her closeness, the quiet trust in the way she surrendered to rest. It was slightly uncomfortable, the sleeper berth never meant for tenderness like this…yet he didn't move. He only adjusted himself, becoming a semi-support, breathing carefully, as though even a deep inhale might disturb her peace. In that moment, he wasn't tired. He wasn't restless. He was simply… full. Full of her presence.

The bus stopped after some time. A short break. The kind where the journey pauses, and everyone steps out to breathe fresh air again.
All four of them—got down, heading toward the washrooms, splashing water, waking themselves up. The place was surprisingly nice. Small shops lined the stop, lights glowing softly, the smell of tea and snacks drifting through the air. They wandered a little. And then…they noticed a garden nearby. A play area. Something gentle and unexpected in the middle of a long road. Adira and Piya had their first real encounter as friends. Two girls meeting properly for the first time. Their smiles were cautious at first, then natural.

Rudra and Dev watched quietly, both of them carrying the same hidden fear—*Where will this lead? How is this beginning?* But it began well. It began with laughter. Piya teased, Adira smiled wider, and soon both girls were laughing at Rudra and Dev's long friendship, the kind of laughter that breaks tension without anyone noticing.

Rudra glanced at Dev. Dev exhaled. Both of them finally breathed in relief. The atmosphere was warm, friendly, light. The first meeting…was good. And for Rudra, somewhere inside, a small knot loosened. Because sometimes, the smallest beginnings—a laugh, a playful moment, a peaceful stop on the road—feel like hope quietly arriving.

Adira settled back into her seat, the plush fabric a soft embrace after the brief, sun-drenched stop. Her hair, a cascade of dark silk, brushed Rudra's shoulder as she leaned in, a faint essence of feminine, and something uniquely hers, warm and sweet, filling the small space between them.

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9. Stay

They landed exactly where they wanted to—smooth, easy, just as they'd hoped. After a quick search, they found an accommodation that fit their budget and the vibe they were after. It was cozy, inviting, with just the right amount of charm.

As soon as they stepped inside, the outside world seemed to stay where it belonged—out there. Rudra couldn't resist. He pulled her close, wrapping his arms around her in a hug that wasn't bone-crushing, but strong enough to feel like an anchor. "How did you even think you'd be sharing a room with Toc?" he asked, his voice playful, almost pleading, like a kid who couldn't believe her presence.

She smiled, letting herself melt into the warmth of the moment, her arms around him in a quiet, tender hug. No words, just the comfort of being there, together, after so much planning.

They quickly settled in, checking out their options for dinner. It didn't take long to find a place. The order still hadn't arrived when she was on the phone, answering family questions with a touch of uncertainty, a hint of nervousness behind her voice. But she handled it, like she always did. There was a little doubt, but more of a soft reassurance, as though everything would be okay.

Back at the room, Rudra took charge, arranging things, setting everything in place—he was a bit of a settling person, liked everything just so. Adira, on the other hand, was a mix of messy and organized—her own kind of balance. But there was no rush. Not here, not now.

They wrapped up and set out for dinner. The evening passed in a gentle flow, and though she stayed on top of her calls home, checking in with her mom, there was something easy about it. Just enough distance, just enough space, but still connected.

When they returned, she had already claimed the bed, her attention caught by a murder mystery on Netflix. Rudra noticed her in the quiet glow of the screen. He'd thought Adira came all the way to watch Netflix.

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10. The Place

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They left just after breakfast — not in a rush, but with the quiet unspoken excitement that comes before a small adventure. The morning still carried a pale softness, sunlight stretching lazily across the streets as they hailed an auto rickshaw.T he ride was long.

The city gradually thinned behind them. Open stretches of road, and eventually to winding paths that curved into hilly terrain. The air changed first — cooler, cleaner — then the scenery followed. Slopes dressed in uneven greens, rocky outcrops breaking through the earth like ancient bones, and in the distance, a shimmer of water that caught the sun like polished glass.

The place was tucked between hills, cradled almost protectively. A lake rested at its center, calm and expansive, bordered by scattered rock formations — some rough and dark, others pale and smooth like marble. The stones looked as though they had been arranged by time itself, not by human hands.

Adira grew quieter the closer they got. By the time they stepped out and walked toward the lake, her silence had settled fully around her. She wasn't upset. Rudra knew that much. But he also knew this particular stillness — the way she withdrew when something felt too beautiful, too overwhelming. It was her way of absorbing the world without breaking it into words.

Still, he was suspicious. "You've gone radio silent," he teased lightly as they approached the boats lined along the shore. She only gave him a small smile — present, but distant — and stepped into the boat carefully. They pushed off from the edge. The lake welcomed them with a soft, rhythmic sound — water brushing against wood, oars dipping and lifting in steady strokes. The boat rocked gently, not enough to disturb, just enough to remind them they were floating.

From the center, the view opened completely. The mountains rose in layered shades of white and grey, their reflections dissolving into the surface of the water. The rocks along the banks looked sculptural from afar, pale streaks catching light. The sky above seemed wider there, unobstructed and honest.

Adira sat opposite him, hands folded loosely in her lap, eyes fixed on the horizon. The breeze played with the loose strands of her hair. There was something almost reverent in the way she watched the landscape — as if speaking would fracture the perfection of the moment. Rudra tried again. "Utter something at least," he murmured. "You look like you're narrating a documentary in your head. "That earned him a faint laugh — soft, but real.

He studied her quietly after that. Her silence wasn't emptiness. It was fullness. The lake, the mountains, the steady hush of water against the boat — it had all settled inside her at once. And when Adira felt too much beauty at the same time, she retreated inward, storing it carefully.
So he let the quiet exist.

The only music was the gentle dipping of the oars and the natural percussion of water touching wood. No engines. No chatter from the shore. Just the lake breathing beneath them. It was a simple moment, but it felt expensive — the kind that cannot be staged or repeated.

And in the middle of it, Rudra realized her silence wasn't distance.
It was awe. From the lake, they made their way toward the waterfall. They heard it before they saw it. A deep, continuous roar — not violent, but commanding. The sound rolled through the air and settled into their chests as they followed the stone pathway carved along the hillside.

And then it appeared. The waterfall was enormous. It fell from a height that made the sky look closer to the earth, a thick white water crashing down with such force that mist rose like breath from the rocks below. The sound was thunderous, almost overwhelming — yet strangely, it did not disturb the peace of the place. Instead, it created its own kind of silence. The kind that exists when nature speaks loudly enough that everything else becomes irrelevant.

They stood there — all four of them — wordless for a moment.

The air was cool and damp. Tiny droplets carried by the wind touched their skin, settled in their hair, rested on eyelashes. The waterfall did not merely exist before them; it reached them, claimed them.
Adira stepped closer to the railing, letting the mist cling to her face. Her earlier silence returned, but this time it felt lighter. The power of the water seemed to wash away the noise in her mind.

Rudra watched her instead of the waterfall. The way the spray softened her features. The way her eyes widened at the sheer scale of it. It was one of those places that resisted description. No photograph could capture the weight of the falling water, the vibration underfoot, the smell of wet stone. It was something to be felt against the skin, not translated into language.

They took photographs — not many, but careful ones. No hurried poses. No exaggerated expressions. Just frames that preserved fragments: the vast curtain of water behind them, a candid laugh caught mid-moment, droplets shining like glass in the air. Quality over quantity. The kind of pictures that could be preserved.

As evening approached, they began their journey toward the temple perched above the hills. The sky had shifted into warm shades of gold and fading blue. They reached the base of a long flight of stone steps and realized they would have to hurry — the temple was nearing its closing time. They climbed quickly, breaths growing heavier, footsteps echoing against the old stone. The climb was steep, and yet there was something invigorating about ascending toward something sacred at dusk.

At the top, Adira paused before entering. She called her mother — a brief, grounding conversation, her voice softer than usual. Perhaps she wanted to share the moment, or perhaps she simply needed that familiar connection before stepping into a place layered with history.

They entered in a rush. The temple was ancient — grand even in its quiet. Tall pillars bore intricate carvings, though many had been damaged. Faces of deities were chipped, patterns interrupted, edges worn by time and violence. They guessed much of the destruction dated back centuries, during invasions that had scarred countless such structures. And yet, despite the broken details, the temple held dignity.

Even hurried, their visit felt meaningful. The last rays of sunlight filtered through the entrance, touching the carved stone in a golden farewell.

They managed a brief glimpse of the sanctum before the attendants signaled closing time. It was not a long visit, but it was enough. By the time they descended the stairs and found another auto rickshaw, night had begun to settle over the hills. The ride back was quieter than the one in the morning. The day had filled them.

The lake's calm. The waterfall's power. The temple's endurance. And somewhere between those places, something unspoken had deepened — not dramatic, not loud, but steady. As the auto carried them back through winding roads toward familiar streets, the hills slowly disappeared behind them. But the feeling stayed.

After they returned, the fatigue arrived quietly. They rested for a while — not sleeping, just lying back and letting the day settle into their muscles. The room carried the faint chill of evening. Outside, the air had turned sharper, the kind that makes you instinctively fold your arms around yourself. Dinner felt slower than breakfast had. There was less chatter, more satisfied silence. The kind that comes after a day well spent.

Someone mentioned a movie. It wasn't a grand plan — just something to stretch the night a little longer. "It's our last evening," one of them said. "We can't just sleep." They agreed in half-hearted enthusiasm, hovering between "yes" and "maybe." The day had been long. But it was also the last they would have together like this — unstructured, unrepeatable.
As they stepped out after dinner, the cold bit a little harder. Adira rubbed her hands together absentmindedly. Rudra noticed — of course he did — but said nothing. Instead, he excused himself casually. "Forgot something in the room. I'll be back." He returned a few minutes later, glasses perched properly on his nose — and something else in his hand.

A pair of hand gloves. Simple. Soft. Warm. He held them out to her without ceremony. "For dramatic weather conditions," he said lightly.
Adira blinked, surprised. Then her face lit up — not loudly, not theatrically — but in that quiet, unmistakable way that made her look younger for a second. She slipped them on immediately, flexing her fingers as if testing treasure.

The movie plan, however, proved less determined. They debated for several minutes — whether to stay out until midnight, whether they had the energy, whether it was practical. It wasn't the most favorable option.

They were already exhausted. But it was the last night, and sentiment often argues poorly against practicality. They finally chose something — a film none of them had seen. Within twenty minutes, it was clear: neither of the girls could relate to it. The storyline felt distant, the characters unconvincing. Their attention wandered. Yawns began to appear, one by one. "This is not worth sacrificing sleep," someone declared. Agreement came quickly. The plan dissolved as simply as it had formed. All four of them hurried back to their rooms, laughter echoing down the hallway in brief bursts before doors closed and quiet reclaimed the space.

They were tired — deeply, satisfyingly tired. Muscles aching from stairs and travel. Hair still faintly scented with mist from the waterfall. Phones filled with carefully chosen photographs.

Exhausted, yes. But fuller than they had been that morning.

As they lay down, sleep was approaching — not empty, but the kind layered with replayed moments: the lake's stillness, the waterfall's thunder, the temple's fading light, the surprise of warm gloves in cold air. The movie had been skipped. But the day itself had been cinematic enough.

11. The Sendoff

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The bags lay half-zipped. Clothes were folded with unusual care, not out of neatness, but reluctance. Each of them moved slowly, stretching time in invisible ways. If they didn't rush, maybe the day wouldn't either. Breakfast happened embarrassingly late — so late it was almost lunch. They laughed about it, calling it "brunch" to feel less guilty. But the humor carried a softness. The kind people use when they're avoiding something inevitable.

All the remaining plans were quietly abandoned.

No more sightseeing. No more "one last place." They headed straight to the bus stand instead. There was an hour left before departure. An hour — such a small, cruel measurement of time.

They wandered into nearby shops, buying small things. Snacks for home. Souvenirs no one truly needed. Trinkets that would later sit on shelves, pretending to be ordinary objects when in truth they carried entire days inside them. Adira picked things up and put them down absentmindedly. Her mind wasn't in the shops.

It was counting. Minutes. Glances. Breaths.

When the bus finally arrived, it didn't feel like transportation. It felt like a deadline. They boarded. Seats were taken. Bags adjusted. Windows slid half-open. The engine started with a vibration that seemed to echo somewhere deeper than the floor.

This was it. The last stretch where Rudra and Adira would be together like this — without distance, without interruption, without the ordinary world reclaiming them. The bus felt like a fragile bubble suspended in motion. A final borrowed space. A last corridor where they could still share silence, still sit close enough to feel each other's warmth, still exist in the same immediate frame.

After this, here would be goodbye. These thoughts lived entirely inside her. Outwardly, she looked composed. She watched the road. She responded when spoken to. She even managed small smiles. But inside, something was unraveling. She wasn't happy. Not exactly sad either — just unsettled. A quiet distress pressing against her ribs. She wanted time to stretch unnaturally long. Wanted the bus to break down, maybe. Wanted traffic. Wanted anything that could delay the moment when this shared space would dissolve into memory. She wanted every minute. Every insignificant second.

The way his sleeve brushed against hers. The way he adjusted his glasses when he was thinking. The way he looked out the window and then back at her, as if confirming she was still there. She wanted to memorize it all. Because once the bus stopped, the world would resume its usual pace. Calls instead of conversations. Messages instead of shared glances. Distance measured not in kilometers, but in missed moments.

She leaned her head lightly against the window, pretending to watch the passing landscape. But her mind was elsewhere — replaying the lake, the waterfall mist, the temple stairs, the gloves in the cold evening. She didn't want "later." She wanted now. Extended. Preserved. And though she didn't say it, didn't reach for his hand dramatically, didn't confess the storm inside her — she felt it intensely: This bus ride was not just a journey back. It was the last page of something beautiful. And she wasn't ready to close it.

The city's pulse thrummed beneath the bus's chassis, a low rumble vibrating through the seats. Distorting the passing streetlights into elongated smears of color.

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The bus stopped without warning — a harsh sound, a shudder, and then silence. People complained. Some stepped down in frustration. But inside her, something loosened.

Relief. More time.

It felt wrong to feel grateful for a breakdown, yet she was. The bus standing still meant the moment wasn't over yet. The goodbye had been postponed. Even if only for a little while. They stood by the roadside together, saying very little. The sky was open above them, the air quiet. No rushing. No countdown. Just a pause gifted by accident. When the replacement bus arrived, reality returned. Movement began again. This time the road felt shorter.

Familiar streets appeared too soon. He dropped her near her house. The world looked ordinary — painfully ordinary — as if nothing significant had just lived and ended inside them. They didn't speak much. They didn't need to. She wanted more time. More minutes. More of him beside her without distance waiting ahead. But she swallowed it.

"Go, B Bye" he said softly. She nodded, managing a small, steady smile. She walked toward her gate, feeling his presence behind her until she stepped inside.

When she finally closed the door, the silence felt different.
Not empty. Just full — with lakes, waterfalls, temple bells, cold evenings, warm gloves, and a bus that had broken at the perfect time. And somewhere in all of it, a goodbye that neither of them had truly said.

12. Its, Christmas

Rudra had begun counting the days. A quiet, relentless countdown to Christmas. She had resigned, and her last day would be the holiday itself. With each passing moment, his anxiety deepened. The days felt heavier, stretching under the weight of his thoughts, and it gnawed at him—this constant, suffocating presence of stress.

Even though Adira tried to reassure him—*"I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I'll stay connected. You don't have to worry."*—he knew better. Somewhere beneath the surface of her words, he felt the truth. After today, nothing would ever be the same. There would be no more stolen glances across the office, no more quiet, accidental meetings of eyes that held everything unsaid. No more of those professional, yet somehow personal, conversations that had always carried something more than the work at hand.

And he knew her well enough to understand her nature. If she was deeply hurt, she would retreat, isolate herself, bury the pain. He would be left without any clues to what she was truly feeling—no presence to gauge her heart from, no subtle shift in her smile or her words. He would be left in the dark, drifting in a space he hadn't prepared for.

The thought of it cracked something inside him, deep and unrelenting.

Days passed, one after another, each dragging him closer to that inevitable moment. Then, the day came—an early leave for both of them. He had prepared, almost over-prepared, for the hours that would slip through his hand. They were ready to go home, but it wasn't just the end of the day they were facing; it was the end of something larger, something unspeakable.

He made stops along the way. A small break midway to get her favorite dish—something she had mentioned in passing weeks ago but never had the chance to indulge in. He found the place she'd longed to visit, air with nostalgia, with something sweet and fleeting. He even picked up her favorite chocolate—first a small bar, then a slightly bigger one, and then another, because he wanted to spoil her in these final moments.
He gave her a Christmas gift: a stuffed toy with an exaggerated, emotional expression.

He wasn't the jolly, healthy Santa figure that day. But for her, he wanted to be something. Something that could, even if only for a moment, give her a smile that would last beyond the final goodbye.

He watched her face light up, the joy in her eyes shining brighter than any gift could. But beneath it, they both knew—this was it. This was the end. Time to go. No more moments, no more shared spaces, no more of the quiet intimacy they had once.

And so, neither of them spoke of it directly. The silence between them said everything. They were already saying goodbye, even as they clung to the moments left.

13. House, Warming

There would be a housewarming at Rudra's new home—home, He knew Adira could not attend. He had known it the moment the date was fixed. The house stood finished now—brick and glass and deliberate silence. Every corner carried his supervision. Every line of the roof reflected his vision. He had argued with contractor even with family for various details. The bedroom, the balcony, the wash area, everything — space must breathe, he'd said. He had chosen textures with the seriousness of a sculptor chiseling permanence into stone. Did he design it for himself?

He wanted to show her everything.

Not the house, not merely that. He wanted to show her the hours spent revising blueprints past midnight. The doubt. The stubbornness. The almost childlike pride when the foundation was poured. He wanted her to see the Hall, the kitchen and he'd grin, "built to handle dramatic laughter." Then, lowering his voice playfully — "Oh, and the bedroom? Completely soundproof… for, you know… peaceful sleep." But she would not be there.

Adira, too, wished to attend. Circumstances—those polite tyrants—had drawn boundaries neither of them could cross. Responsibilities. Geography. Commitments.

So, He invited her one evening to see his house. Not as a grand… but as something quietly personal.

Two floors. Fresh walls. Empty rooms. A space that still smelled of cement, paint, and beginnings. It wasn't fully lived in yet. It was waiting. Just like him.

Adira arrived softly, her presence filling the emptiness in a way furniture never could. Rudra walked beside her, showing her everything with a strange tenderness. "This is the hall," he said. The hall was wide, silent, unfinished…yet in his eyes it looked like a future. Then the kitchen. A simple space, bare shelves, no utensils yet—but he could already imagine warmth there. Meals. Life.

He showed her the store room, almost shyly, as if even the smallest corner mattered when she was looking at it. Then they went upstairs. First floor. Bathroom. Empty rooms again. But with her footsteps inside them, they didn't feel empty anymore. They felt possible.

They came back down. Sat together on the ground floor. No sofa. No luxury. Just two people in an unfinished house.

Talking. Chatting. Breathing. And then pizza—her favorite.

That small detail made Rudra smile inwardly. Even in chaos, even in uncertainty… some things remained sweetly familiar. The atmosphere was good. Soft. Almost normal. Almost like the world outside didn't exist.

Rudra sat there, watching her. Not just seeing her…watching.

In doubt. In longing. Minutes passed.

And he kept checking her silently—her expressions, her comfort. As if he was asking without words: Is it okay? Can I? Are you still here with me… even for this moment?

His heart craved one thing. Not anything wild. Not anything complicated. Just…a hug. A gentle one. The kind that doesn't demand. The kind that simply says—I am here. You are here. That is enough. He didn't move yet. He only watched her, standing inside his empty home, feeling that her presence alone was already filling it more than walls ever could.

Finally, he gathered his courage. "Come here," he said, rising and walking towards the small wash area near the back door. He turned, arms open, leaving the decision to her. To his surprise, she moved, not a hesitant step, but a swift, tight embrace. Her arms wrapped around his neck, pulling him close. He couldn't hold back, multiplying the tightness, crushing her against him.

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Outside, the world had resumed its quiet indifference. Evening was lowering itself carefully over rooftops, dimming edges, softening certainty. Time, which had dissolved so completely in their closeness, returned with an almost accusatory presence. It was getting dark. She had to leave. Of course she did. People always return to their separate orbits. But why did the ordinary necessity of departure feel like betrayal?

Rudra was only just recovering from the incident—if it could be called that. Incident sounded clinical, almost trivial. Was it an accident? A decision? A surrender? Their pulse still echoed in their ears, or was it memory replaying sensation? The body remembers what the mind tries to categorize.

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What happened? Did that really happen? Are they real—this version of themselves who crossed a threshold so effortlessly? And so they parted—each walking into separate corridors of night—wondering whether what they shared dissolve by morning, like a dream too vivid to trust?

Or would it linger—stubborn and undeniable—etched into memory for a lifetime?

14. The Book

After their last encounter, Rudra's heart didn't just race for a moment—it raced for days. Weeks. It was a steady pulse of longing, anxiety, and quiet confusion. He didn't get a single day to process it, not one hour to talk through it like it was real. They had gone, pretending it hadn't happened. If they hadn't clicked pictures, maybe it would have felt easier to feel unreal.

But she had given him something over the period of time. A picture. A collection of moments. A series of memories that would remain etched into his mind forever. He had never thought he could feel this way for someone again, not after his last breakup. It was as if his heart had been sealed in a box for so long, and now, suddenly, it was wide open—raw, exposed, and vulnerable. Rudra knew this feeling. He had felt it before, but not like this. Not like her.

He had a deep, undeniable need to give her something back. Something extraordinary. Something that would anchor this feeling, this connection, and make it last. Something *memorable*.

There was an incident, small, almost insignificant, but it stayed with him. Adira, in one of those moments of distraction, forgot the pattern on her phone. Just one minute before, she had been handling it, and then the next—she couldn't remember the lock. She tried again. Then again. Nothing. The frustration, the helplessness in her eyes, it struck him. She had always been so sharp, so in control, but this? This was different. Funny, wasn't it? A person so precise, forgetting something she did every day.

He had teased her about it, of course. Playfully, gently, never to hurt, just to make light of the moment. But the truth was, it wasn't just forgetfulness. It was her body's way of shielding her from the weight of things she didn't want to remember. Sometimes she held on to memories so tightly that the body, in its own defense, simply let them slip away. Not out of malice, not intentionally, but as a kind of emotional reset. A stress reducer.

And that's when he realized. If he were to give her something, it had to be something tangible.

Something physical. Something that could withstand time, like a memory, but also feel real in her hands. He wanted to give her something to hold on to. Something that, even if they never saw each other again, would remain.

Adira had always been an avid reader. A lover of books, of stories, of worlds built from ink and paper eventually e-books. And in the future, when someone else loved her, when she was surrounded by millions of people, hundreds of voices, a sea of admirers, he knew one thing for certain—no one would write for her the way he could. No one would remember the little things the way he did. No one could capture her in the way he saw her.

His mind made up, Rudra agreed with himself. This might be his only chance. The second-to-last gift he would ever give her. The first, he thought with a twinge of sadness, would have been for her wedding.

The tension between them had been building, thick and unspoken. She had joked, half-laughing, half-serious, *"Yes, I'll call you to my wedding."* But there was hesitation, a wall she had built up in front of him. She hadn't given him a card, not yet. She said she would, in person, but then her words shifted. She would meet him somewhere outside. Not at the wedding, but somewhere else. Two options—his newly constructed home or a café. If she had chosen his home, it might have led to something they both knew would complicate things, so instead, she chose the café.

But it wasn't about the choice. It wasn't about the place. It was about the unspoken storm inside of her. Would he come? If he did, could she face him? Could she meet his eyes, knowing the weight of all that had been left unsaid between them? Could she stand in the presence of someone who had seen her at her most vulnerable, who had shared those moments with her, and not crumble under the quiet pressure of their shared past?

Rudra knew all of this. He felt it in his bones. He could sense the turbulence in her, even if she never said a word. He knew this might be his last chance to give her something, anything. If she never invited him—if that card was never given then this would be the final gesture.

And so, with everything swirling inside of him—his emotions, his thoughts, the quiet ache of not knowing what tomorrow would bring—
he did something he had never done before. He sat down, at last, and began to write.

A person who had never truly read a novel. A person who had never written anything longer than a brief message or a passing thought. He started. He wrote. He didn't know how long it would take, how much it would hurt, or what it would become—but he knew this: He was writing for her. Writing for the person who had quietly become the center of his world.

And in that silence, with only the flicker of a screen and the weight of his emotions surrounding him, he began to put fingers to note. This might be his only gift to her. And somehow, it felt like it had been the only thing that mattered.

At first, Rudra thought it would take only a few moments—just a handful of incidents he could count on his fingers. But as he started, realized how wrong he was. The moments were endless. They came in phases—bright, fleeting times of laughter, the cold stretches of distance and sorrow, the fiery bursts of pain, the quiet embers of hope, and shining moments of happiness. There were memories he could hardly remember, and then memories that came crashing back in waves, each one more vivid than the last.

And so, he began to break it all down. Each memory, each piece, scattered like puzzle fragments he now had to collect and put together. He was reconstructing her, reconstructing them, as she went about her days, lost in her own world, unaware of the silent work he was doing.

He had shared Chapter 1 with her, his own creation, every word born of emotion, of rawness, of everything he couldn't say out loud. It had been honest. It had been real. The words weren't perfect—he knew that—but they were his, given to her, written only for her. To his surprise, she had given it a chance. She read it, and when she finished, there was something in her eyes that made his heart ache with a strange mixture of pride and pain. She had admired it. Astonished by it. She had praised his efforts, even as she knew that the next chapter—his next words—would be harder. They would hurt more.

He kept asking himself the same question: *Will she read Chapter 2?* Will she finish the book he had written, the one that was meant only for her? The book that was not just a collection of words, but a fragment of his soul? Would she read it once? Twice? A hundred times? Or would it remain just a piece of her past, a thing she left behind, a thing too heavy to carry?

And then there was the question that haunted him most: *Will she ever invite him to her wedding?*

Adira knew that she was not ready for that kind of emotional truth. Not now. Not in this moment when so much was uncertain.

"I can't do this now, Rudra," she had said, her voice soft, almost apologetic. "I care about you, but I'm not in a place where I can face these emotions... not now. It might devastate me. I'm already losing so much—I can't risk losing myself in the process. I can't carry that weight right now."

Her words hit him like a cold wind. There was nothing left for him to say, nothing left but the understanding that she was right. She was already holding so much, and if he added more weight to her shoulders, it might break her. He couldn't do that to her. He just nodded, letting her words sit between them, soft and final.

And so, he continued to write. Even when his own heart was sinking, when the weight of her silence pressed down on him. He wrote, because that was all he could do. It was his gift, his offering to her. A story he had recreated for her and her alone.

Days passed, and the countdown to the end of their time together drew closer. But strangely, Rudra was not sad. He was living inside the words he wrote, inside the memories he was still holding on to. He was there with her, in the spaces between the pages, in the moments he had captured. And maybe, just maybe, that was enough.

But the final truth lingered in the corners of his mind:
She was out of his league. She always had been. And no matter how much he wrote, no matter how many words he poured into the pages, there would always be that gap between them. The one she would never be able to cross.

And with that thought, Rudra allowed himself a quiet, bittersweet understanding. Maybe the book would remain unfinished. Maybe it would never be read again. But the act of writing it, of capturing their story, had been the closest thing to living for her, with her, that he could ever experience.

Epilogue

And in the end, maybe that was all that mattered. For both of them. The love they had given each other, wrapped up in unspoken words, in memories, in fleeting moments—no matter how distant they now seemed. Rudra had poured his heart onto the pages, hoping to capture something that would stay with her long after their time together ended. And Adira, in her own way, had given him her truth, her quiet support, her presence, even as she kept her distance.

It wasn't perfect, but it was real. Neither of them had been able to give the other everything they wanted, but perhaps they had given enough. Enough to last in the spaces between the silence, enough to echo in their hearts when the world grew quiet.

For Rudra, it was the act of writing that became his gift to her—a reflection of all the things he couldn't say, and all the things he feared would remain unsaid. But even if those words never fully reached her, even if she never read them or never understood them in the way he hoped, they were still his truth. And that, in the end, was enough.

For Adira, it was the love she had quietly held onto, the emotions she had buried to protect herself, the way she had tried to give him something, even if it was never enough for either of them. She had tried to care, tried to understand, tried to keep him close without allowing herself to fall too deep. In the end, she knew she was leaving behind pieces of herself, too—pieces she had given to him in the most subtle, unspoken ways.

Perhaps they would never have the kind of ending they both dreamed of. Perhaps they would never fully understand each other's pain, or grasp the weight of the love they had once shared. But in their hearts, they would always carry those moments—imperfect and unfinished—but real. And maybe that was enough.

For both of them.

Unsaid

He watched her as if she were sunlight made human — her glowing skin, her radiant face, every expression soft and alive. A sweet, foolish longing rose in him. He wanted to touch that warmth, to cradle her cheeks, to tease her gently and watch her blush. But they were nothing to each other.
No shared department, no mutual friends, not even a proper "hello". Then Holi drew near — the festival of colors, of fearless moments. A day when strangers could step closer, when a touch could be innocent and playful. He held onto that hope like a secret. Maybe, under a shower of bright colors, he could finally reach out — softly brushing color onto her glowing face, letting his trembling fingers say what his lips never could. And the thought alone filled him with a tender, trembling excitement.

Holi

Rudra was at the office when Adira left for home, already missing him enough to frown at the road ahead. Lost in her thoughts, she took a completely wrong turn, wandering onto a new road without even realizing it. Of course, she called him. "Rudraaa…" And then he realized the masterpiece she had created. "You did WHAT? That turn was obvious!" he shouted, half concerned, half entertained beyond control. He Guided her.

And this wasn't even new. There was that legendary day when she forgot her own phone pattern lock. One second before unlocking it — she knew it. The next second — blank. Gone. Vanished from her brain record history. How does someone forget a pattern they draw every single day? Who does that?

Who in the world??? does that And while most girls scroll through fashion sites … Adira? She explores Zomato. Swiggy. Restaurant reviews. "Top 10 pizzas near me." "Best rated within 2 km." How many people in the world window-shop for food instead of clothes?

He laughed at her. Teased her endlessly. But secretly He adored this chaos. Because — it was innocent, playful, and uniquely hers. And somehow, he loved being the one she called when she lost her way.

Uniquely, Hers

It started as a dull ache in her thighs. Heavy. Familiar. A warning. The first time he noticed, he leaned in, mischievous. "Pain in your legs… pain in your brain. Headache, right?" From then on, "headache" became their secret code. A word that carried care without words. Whenever it returned, he'd glance at her softly. "Headache?" And both knew.

Headache

...

Oh Shit !

Adira had said softly, "She'll introduce him to her friends." Her friend had replied with a grin, "Just when she's sure… when she knows how she feels about Rudra." Adira had told him. He smiled, unsure what to say, but grateful. She had included him in a future that felt distant yet close. A promise. A quiet assurance that there was room for him. But weeks turned to months. The introduction never came. She never mentioned it again. The clarity she'd promised never arrived. He felt the distance , gap between her promise and the quiet reality.

Intro, that never happened

Her bond with her mum soft, sugary, full of tantrums, giggles and secret glances — so pure that no one nearby could resist noticing it. To him, she was "Adira." sweet and cute to be pampered. But teasing her? was some different. Without involving girl other than Adira herself, the safest, most delightful accomplice will be ? Her mum. He would flash that innocent grin and inquire about her mum stretching her nickname just enough to make her roll her eyes. While he pretended complete innocence. Adira would get furious sometimes— cheeks flushing, eyes sparkling with mock anger. " Stop calling her that ! shutuppp".

Shutuppp

She had very beautiful eyes—so beautiful, so expressive—almost more alive like her face. Rudra was always fond of those soft Adira eyes. He would often ask her to take off her spectacles, just so he could truly see them—embrace the quiet beauty and honesty resting behind the glass. Sometimes he wondered how she had grown up this long without realizing the charm she carried in them.

One day she applied kajal, and suddenly the depth of her eyes felt even more striking, like their stories had grown darker and clearer at once. But she was mischievous, curious too; she tried contact lenses. The first time they only added a faint shine, and he thought it was alright. The next time they were colored, and she was excited about the change. He wasn't—because to him, she was already beautiful in the most natural way, and those eyes never needed borrowed colors to make them shine.

Those, eyes of hers

She kept refusing Harshad—though he was everything a family would want. Good job, emotional nature, good family. Even their mothers shared warmth. There was no visible flaw, no logical reason to say no. Yet her heart would not agree. Her family kept asking why. She had no answer. How could she explain a feeling she didn't fully understand herself? Everything felt beyond her control. The pressure grew heavier, and with it, the distance between her and Rudra quietly widened.

Kit -kat has verbal sis, who did take stand on similar situation,
but Adira did not. She cant't, her nature was not allowing her to hurt her family. In trying to justify her refusal, she lost clarity. Perhaps the real conflict was never about Harshad at all. Perhaps she wasn't afraid of saying no to him—but afraid of saying yes to the One .

Might, she would have said yes

She was on tour. Walking wasn't her thing; she always preferred staying put. Yet that day, she found herself in the busy market, weaving through stalls and narrow lanes, drawn by a quiet insistence. Not for anything expensive. Not for something that would make a statement. She wandered farther than she intended, turning corners she didn't recognize,
losing track of where she was. She searched for a small, simple thing — a little reminder, a token that could quietly say, I remembered you.

So lost

After a long stretch of silence — no calls, no real messages, no effort that felt visible — the distance between them had grown sharp and undeniable. They met at Sugar Quotes, a place meant for sweetness, but carried only tension that night. He arrived already wounded, convinced he no longer mattered to her. In his mind, the silence meant rejection. He started considering himself— worthless fighting for. He was prepared to end it. But she spoke first. She said she had tried — Tried convincing her mum, her family, her uncle, harder than he ever knew. Not angrily, but with exhaustion. There were no sweet words, no comfort. Only two people sitting across from each other, both hurting, both deprived of others touch, believing they had been the only fighting alone.

There was a time when they have shared a lot of moments, emotional as well physical ones, now at this moment a simple hand held seemed impossible. She resisted a little, a little more and still allowed at end as might this simple touch might fill in some pain.

Sugar Quotes

Adira, with that calm face of hers, always looked gentle—sometimes a little mischievous—but her eyes carried a quiet honesty that made her seem almost innocent. Anyone meeting her would easily think she was simply a sweet, well-behaved girl. But there was another side to her too. She read books—not the usual soft novels, but the strange, exotic kind that stirred thoughts she herself could barely explain, quiet fantasies she kept hidden behind that innocent smile.

...

Nube or Pro

*Whatever they once shared had thinned into silence. That evening, they took their familiar *sukoon* road—the quiet stretch that had once held their emotions. Her bike , Out of fuel. He was already a little ahead when her call came. Coincidence, almost cruel in its symmetry—he, too, was running on almost nothing. The nearest petrol pump was still kilometers away, Pushing the vehicle felt impossible.*
He decided to siphon fuel. No bottle. Yet just a few steps away—as if placed there by a kinder script—he found an empty one. He filled it carefully, poured life back into her bike. They rode together to the petrol pump, this time on one bike. The air had already changed.
Something unspoken had shifted its weight. The distance they had guarded for months began to feel fragile.
She hesitated behind him, careful not to let her hands rest where they once belonged. He noticed. Without turning fully, he reached back, took her hand, and pulled her gently around him. The hug began gently—hesitant, Then it deepened. Not with urgency, but with surrender. Months of silence, distance, and unspoken ache dissolved between them. It wasn't just a physical closeness—it was an emotional return.
And the most overwhelming part was how natural it was. No struggle. No forcing. Just two hearts finding their way back—smoothly, effortlessly—as if it had always been meant to happen.

Destined

Adira's face was fine-boned, delicate, almost fragile. Her shoulders and waist were slender, tapering softly into fuller hips — a silhouette better understood by sculptors than mirrors. But mirrors lied. "I'm getting fat," she said, scrutinizing herself. Rudra never let it pass. "Where? Who says that?" he asked, mock serious. To him, she was quiet perfection.
She wore almost no makeup — never needed it. Her skin glowed naturally. Her eyes — wide, soft yet defiant — only needed a touch of kajal to captivate, adored her like he could just dive in depth of he eyes.

Her face was way expressive, way than her words could when exited, He admired her like a landscape at dusk: whole, complete to watch without blink .The line of her neck. The curve of her chest. The slushy bulking of her waist into hips and heavy thighs. Nothing was excessive. Nothing less. She was harmonious beauty. She called herself less, daring him silently. And he contradicted her, every time, with certainty.

Where she saw flaws, he saw grace.

His, 'Favorite Woman'

*There is '**The Other Side**' of this story too, one that has already been written. The side filled with her struggles, her confusion, and all the emotions she carried because of the other guy—where there was only him and the feelings that came with him. But those pages will remain untouched here. Bringing them into this book would mean reliving emotions that are far too sentimental for the life she is living today.*

*There are still so many moments left to be written in this book. But no, **this is it**.*

Thank You !

The Other Side

Him...Only

1.

He came without preface, without warning — *Harshad*. A name that sounded heavier than the man himself.His mother had reached out through a matrimonial group. Profiles were exchanged, photographs studied with polite curiosity. They said they liked her. That was enough to begin.They suggested a meeting — just to talk, just to see. Nothing binding. Two strangers at a table, carrying guarded expectations. On her side, there were none worth naming. It was meant to be simple. Casual. Disposable, if necessary.

But timing is rarely kind.

Her brother — the careful one, the *adira* brother — was about to return to their hometown. What should have remained a quiet encounter between two individuals was gently, almost absent-mindedly, elevated. Casual became formal. Personal became social. And suddenly, it was no longer a meeting between just a Harshad and her.

It was between families.

The first meeting — the one that should have been light, forgettable — acquired weight. A restaurant was chosen. A neutral ground. Two unfamiliar families sitting across from one another, sharing food that no one truly tasted, speaking sentences polished for decency. Plates arrived. Questions followed. Smiles were practiced.

What had been intended as a conversation between two unknown people had shifted into something measured, observed, and evaluated. A private possibility turned into a public assessment. A couple's meeting had quietly transformed into a family's inspection. And somewhere in that crowded table of voices. A formal meeting, the simplicity was already gone.

2.

Adira described Harshad to Rudra without inflection, as though she were listing groceries."Fair," she had said. "Almost my height. Round face. Smiles a little. A small belly. His mother's favorite."No laughter. No complaint. No warmth either. Just observation — drained of colour.
He began texting her soon after. Messages arrived without pause — forwarded reels, half-formed jokes, questions that did not wait for answers. Conversations stretched longer than necessary. Meetings appeared suddenly, framed as coincidence. If he was in her hometown, he found reasons to be near it. If he was nearby, he found reasons to see her.He hovered.Adira never said she invited him.

There was a day she had been worn thin by housework, by noise, by the small unending demands of home. Her body ached. Her head felt fevered. She wanted silence, perhaps sleep. Instead, she stepped out to meet him.

Why? Because Harshad wanted to see her before leaving town.

That was reason enough — for him.He did not ask if she was well enough. He did not hear the weight in her replies. He did not pause to consider whether exhaustion had already hollowed her out. His wish to meet outweighed her need to rest.

Understanding did not arrive with him. Concern did not either.

What mattered was that he wanted to see her.And so she went — carrying her fatigue like an obligation, smiling faintly so that his desire would not feel denied.

What was once introduced as a casual meeting had swollen into something staged.It was no longer a conversation. It was a presentation.

The families gathered — chairs aligned, expressions measured, tea poured carefully into fragile cups. Adira sat among them, aware of eyes that lingered a second too long. Questions were asked gently, but the intention beneath them was not gentle at all.They were not merely meeting her.They were assessing her.

Did she suit him? Would she fit? Could she be approved?

Some members of his family seemed satisfied. Polite nods. Half-smiles. A quiet murmur that she was "nice." It should have ended there — with that restrained approval.But it did not.It was mentioned, almost apologetically, that Harshad's aunt had been absent. She could not attend the gathering. Yet she "very much wanted" to see the girl. She cared enough to inspect — just not enough to rearrange her time.

The message was delivered without embarrassment.They wanted Adira to visit the aunt's house separately. To arrive dressed in a saree. To stand before another pair of evaluating eyes. To be seen again. Measured again.As though one display had not been sufficient.As though she were an item inadequately marketed the first time, now requiring better packaging. Proper branding. A second showing to improve chances of acceptance.

Everything until that moment had been uncomfortable but tolerable. This, however, shifted something inside the room.

Her family felt it first — the quiet sting of indignity. The sense that their daughter was being placed on exhibition shelves. Adira felt it too, though she said little. A heaviness settled behind her ribs, dense and airless.

They did not like it. Not the tone. Not the request. Not the implication.

So they refused. Not loudly. Not permanently. But enough to draw a line — even if only for a while.

A distance finally appeared. Not loud. Not dramatic. Just a thin, visible crack between the two families.

Adira's family began to withdraw their interest. They were not merchants. They would not place their daughter under repeated lighting for inspection. The matter slowly dissolved — without announcement, without confrontation. It simply thinned out.

Adira allowed herself to believe it was over. She thought this was the last she would hear of Harshad. The knocking would cease. The pressure would settle. The door would remain closed.

3.

But Harshad was not a man who released easily.

Months passed in uneasy quiet. Then he began again — not directly this time. He circled back through her mother. Polite inquiries. Sweetened words. Carefully constructed assurances. Promises shaped to sound reasonable. He spoke of sincerity, of patience, of seriousness. He presented himself not as persistent, but as committed. It was persistence. Fabricated calm. Measured persuasion.
And slowly, resistance weakened — not because Adira's heart shifted, but because fatigue does strange things to opposition. Her family listened. They reconsidered. They softened. His consistency began to look like dedication. His rigidity was mistaken for stability.

It was sorted. Not the way Adira would have liked. Not with relief.
But it was settled — in a way that left her quiet again, standing inside a decision that felt less like agreement and more like surrender.

Adira had already begun to lose control of the narrative of her own life.

There were feelings she had never managed to voice — especially the ones about Rudra. They sat inside her like unsent letters, folded and refolded until the creases tore. She could not bring herself to place them before her family. Not because they were foolish, but because they were fragile. And fragile things rarely survive inspection.

So she stayed silent. And in that silence, decisions started forming without her.

Harshad, meanwhile, kept knocking — not always literally, but persistently enough to feel like it. Messages. Calls. Sudden plans. His presence circled her days like something patient and inevitable. He behaved as though momentum itself were consent.

She tried to say no. Not dramatically. Not rebelliously. Just a quiet no. A restrained refusal without explanation.

But explanations are demanded when a daughter resists. Silence is mistaken for confusion. Hesitation is labeled immaturity. Her family remained unconvinced.
"What is the problem?" they asked in different ways. "He seems decent."

“Everyone liked him.”

Adira had no language that would satisfy them. She could not say that her heart was elsewhere. She could not say that she felt cornered. She could not articulate the exhaustion of being evaluated, pursued, and negotiated over. So she stood there — voiceless between expectation and insistence — while the knocking did not stop. And every unanswered knock made her silence look more unreasonable than his persistence.

4.

A day was fixed. An agreement ceremony. A quiet acknowledgment. A small commitment, nothing elaborate — just a formal nod between two families, contained within walls that could hold whispers without turning them into spectacle.It was meant to be simple. A room. A handful of relatives. A brief ritual to mark intention, not celebration.

But Harshad was still Harshad. He did not believe in smallness.

What should have remained restrained began to swell — decorators, lighting, coordinated outfits, glittering backdrops. The modest agreement began to resemble like a full ring ceremony. It was no longer an understanding between families; it was an announcement. A display. A declaration dressed in excess.

Adira watched it unfold with a tightening in her chest.She was not comfortable with the expense. Nor the grandeur. Nor the noise of it all. Commitment, to her, had felt heavy and serious — something quiet. Not something draped in lights.

But Harshad wanted it. And when he wanted something, it gathered weight. His family followed his desire, arranging everything as elaborately as they could manage. Each addition justified as happiness. Each extravagance framed as love.

To keep him pleased, they expanded it. Adjusted it. Amplified it. And Adira stood at the center of preparations that did not feel like hers — watching a private promise transform into a public performance. The lights were bright. But she felt dimmer with each one added, even she wiped her eyes thinking of future near ending of program.

5.

Harshad had already planned everything. The family visit, the agreement ceremony, the ring ceremony, shopping, the wedding — all lined up one after another. There was no gap between them. No slow moments.

It felt less like celebration and more like a chase. But something about the precision felt suffocating. Every decision already polished. Every step predetermined. Adira on other side, did not feel included in the making of it — only placed within it.

To him, this was excitement. Adira felt the stress before anyone named it. In the way conversations ended too quickly. Harshad's laughter was slightly too loud. In the way Adira's silence lengthened each evening.

To Rudra, it felt different. He believed important things should be felt deeply , not rushed. At first, he told himself that Harshad was just happy. Maybe this was how some people show love — by planning everything quickly, by trying to secure the future fast. Rudra tried to accept it. He thought, *If Harshad is happy, maybe he will keep Adira too, that is enough.*

But slowly, the pressure started to grow. The demands were small at first — follow this plan. Harshad did not think he was forcing anything. He believed he was building something beautiful. But he never noticed how little space he was leaving for Adira to breathe.

Adira, who stood between , began to feel stressed. The atmosphere was no longer light. Conversations felt heavy. Even happy moments felt planned, not natural.

Harshad thought he was being perfect — responsible, prepared, ready for the future. But sometimes, being too prepared , being too haste can feel overwhelming. Sometimes too much can feel like control.

Demands came disguised as devotion. Expectations wrapped in celebration. Gestures large enough to impress the world. Programs elaborate enough to leave no doubt. He mistook excess for affection. The more he gave, the more he expected in return — obedience, enthusiasm, alignment.

6.

The month of the wedding was fixed — only a few months away. Dates marked. Venues discussed. Lists drafted.There was no pause long enough for breath.

Harshad came from money. Not quiet money — visible money. He earned well, belonged to a comfortable, established family, and carried the assurance of someone who had never been denied. He was the only son. The only boy. The center of the household's gravity.

Pampered into importance. Elevated into certainty. In that house, his wishes did not fall to the ground unanswered. They were caught mid-air and fulfilled before doubt could touch them. Desire, for him, was not suggestion — it was direction. And above all, he wanted grandeur.

The wedding could not be ordinary.

He wanted a destination wedding — curated, scenic, impressive. Something people would speak about. Something photographed in drone shots and filtered in gold. For Adira's family, the word "destination" did not sound romantic. It sounded expensive.

They had already strained themselves through her brother's marriage. Savings thinned. Accounts unsettled. Recovery unfinished. And now this — lakhs more, demanded by spectacle.

They hesitated. They negotiated.In the end, they agreed — with adjustments. A destination slightly outside their hometown. Two days of stay. Costs split equally between both families. It was already stretching their capacity, already pressing against numbers that felt unsafe.

But they said yes. The package, though high, might have been manageable.

It was not enough for Harshad. He began adding layers — upgraded décor, designer details, premium add-ons. Every suggestion framed as "just this small enhancement." Every increase subtle in tone, severe in cost. The budget rose quietly, but steadily — exceeding what had been discussed.

Adira's family saw the numbers. They understood the weight. But they also understood fear —

the fear of disappointing the groom's side, the fear of unsettling the future, the fear that resistance now would disturb the fragile stability already built.

So they convinced themselves. It is for her happiness. It is for her settled future. It is only money.And the wedding grew larger. And heavier. And far more extravagant than the comfort of the girl at its center.

7.

The days folded into each other until her birthday arrived, a quiet pulse against the storm of arrangements and ceremonies that had taken over her life. Harshad had plans, of course. Grand, sweeping, meticulously crafted plans. A tour — just the two of them — somewhere hilly, near a lake, borrowed car shining in the sun, everything framed to look effortless and romantic. She wore a simple one-piece, and yet the setting made it feel like a stage. They laughed quietly, spoke softly, shared a sunflower — a ridiculous sunflower, and yet it was meant for her. Who gives a sunflower, really? But somehow, he did.

It was his first attempt at a birthday gift, and he overcompensated. Gifts piled up, childish in gesture, but carefully curated to suit her age count and her tastes. Adira felt herself pulled into the fantasy, against her better judgment. It was excessive, it was too much, and yet, it was intended to touched her in ways no quiet word ever could.

They returned. Dinner arranged, cake cutting twice, family gathered. Everything was staged, orchestrated, sparkling. Fancy. Countable. Measurable. Harshad's world, executed perfectly.

Meanwhile, Rudra lingered in the shadows of reality. His gift was simpler, quieter. He waited for the noise to fade, for Harshad and her brother to leave town. And then he approached, holding a small offering, a gift without spectacle. He gave it with no expectation, no fanfare — only the hope that something small, honest, could reach her, even if just for a moment.

Adira took it, feeling the weight of everything else pressing behind her. The extravagance, the grand gestures, the glittering days — all of it paled against this quiet offering. And in that silence, she felt a pang, an ache, a longing she could not name. Happiness had been gifted to her before, yet it had always arrived in glittering packages she did not ask for. This — this was hers alone.

Her chest tightened. Her eyes stung. The world was still vast, still complicated, still demanding. But here — here was a fragment of something simple, honest, and entirely her own. And she held it close, even as the glittered shadows of Harshad's world waited just outside the door.

8.

The day of her wedding had arrived — closure, completion, everything meticulously arranged. Plans laid out, schedules aligned, and shopping lists ticked off. For most brides, this would be the happiest part — deciding what to wear, imagining themselves beautiful, imagining admiration in every glance. For Adira, it was already heavy with expectation.

Harshad wanted lavish. Not just lavish, but *aligned with him*. Every detail of her appearance had to match his vision. He insisted she wear something extra traditional — something so ornate that Adira felt her own taste, her own sense of self, would be swallowed whole. She tried to resist, a quiet "no" tucked into hesitant words. He agreed — but only with an unsatisfied yes, the kind that smells of displeasure even when nothing is said.

She went shopping anyway, clinging to a fragment of autonomy. A red gown caught her eye — simple, elegant, understated, and entirely suited to her character. Not glittering, not ostentatious, but beautiful in its quiet way. She sent pictures, hoping to share a moment of mutual satisfaction.

It was not enough.

To him, the gown was too low, too plain, too insufficient. Satisfaction, in his eyes, could not be compromised. He called her mother. News traveled fast to his father. Her father asked if there was a funding issue — anything, they would cover it. Replace the dress, he suggested, with something flashy. Something worthy of *his* family's vision.

Adira felt a surge of rage. *It is my wedding too,* she wanted to scream. *Do they think we are poor? Is choice not allowed?*

It was not about cost. It was never about cost. It was about autonomy, about being allowed to wear what she loved, about her voice in the one day meant to belong to her. Yet her choice was overridden. The original gown was discarded, replaced with something that pleased others but bruised her spirit. Her mother frowned too, a silent shadow beside her. Raged she reach home, disappointed, just followed by chocolate, to prove that he might be not done as she desired but still accept as a token of compensation, childish act.

There was even no need if had respected her wish. Her sisters whispered disappointment at the concession, at the agreement made under invisible pressure.

Adira stood there, heart heavy, voice trapped, frown permanent, wondering how a day meant for joy could feel so constricting, so invaded, so far from her own.

9.

The pre-wedding, photoshoot came next. Another demand, another stage. Not local, not discreet — it had to be grand, a destination shoot hundreds of kilometers away, a two- or three-day stay, just the two of them, lodged with strangers' families in unfamiliar places.

Adira refused. Her family refused. It was not merely the distance or the expense. It was the principle: two people alone, away from all oversight, for days. A moral boundary, quietly firm, that she could not ignore.

The refusal traveled faster than she could control. His family — first his mother, then his father — received the news as if it were an affront. Her "no" struck them like a sword. They demanded to know: *"Are you really interested in this wedding?"*

The question split her entirely.Adira had nothing to say. Her words, meant to remain between them, had leaked into the judgment of families. How could a grown man allow that? How could the conversation between them not final yet be delivered to his mother, transformed into complaint or concern?
Was he a child, a baby, needing his mother to carry him through every difficulty? Did she have to endure a lifetime of mediating immaturity?

Rage consumed her. She remained silent for a day, letting the anger burn in private. And then she confronted him.

"Is this really right?" she asked. "Is my word never enough? Are my feelings always to be mediated through families?"

Her voice was quiet, but deadened — hollow at the edges. She had already said yes to her family's wishes, agreeing to go a day before with half her mind, half her soul. But she wanted acknowledgment. Recognition. Respect.

Harshad, ever persistent, found words to convince her again. The way he did it left her exhausted, drained. Her refusal, her moral boundary, her tiny flicker of autonomy — all dissolved under the weight of his insistence. The pre-wedding outside her hometown, which she had rejected, was reinstated.

Adira agreed. But the heart inside her was hollow. The compliance was mechanical. The excitement, the joy, the light that might have existed —

all extinguished. She moved forward with the motions of a bride, but the core of her spirit had already turned gray.

Everything that should have been hers — choice, voice, freedom — had been quietly consumed. And the silence inside her was absolute.

10.

Grief settled quietly, but heavy, in the space between them.

Rudra watched from afar, a silent witness to everything Adira endured. He saw her moving through the motions, carrying burdens no one should have to bear. Her frown was constant, subtle yet deep, shadowing her features. Sometimes she hesitated, words caught in her throat. Sometimes her voice hitched, trembling with unspoken frustration. Sometimes a faint, fleeting spark of rage flickered in her, quickly subdued. He observed it all — the sorrow she tried to hide, the weight she could not release, the compromises that had hollowed her.

Harshad, the man Rudra had once thought ideal for her, was revealed to be something different. Perfect, perhaps, in appearances and intention, but overwhelming, packaged, over-equipped — more than anyone could need, more than anyone could manage.

Adira, already exhausted and drained, had surrendered. Hope had slipped from her hands, and she agreed to the arrangements, to the expectations, to the path laid before her.

Rudra too had given in, accepting the reality of her future, wanting her to be safe and settled, yet powerless to alter anything. The plans, the extravagance, the rigid insistence — none of it could be softened by them. Both of them, helpless, could only watch, feeling the weight of sorrow they could not lift.

And yet, even amidst helplessness and grief, there was a quiet tenderness. Rudra carried it in his chest: the knowledge of her resilience, her moments of quiet defiance, her soul that still burned beneath the heavy demands placed upon her. It was a grief touched with care, raw and intimate, but also a reminder that even in surrender, the heart could remain quietly alive.

But grief does not disappear simply because it is quiet.

It was not love that frightened her. It was the absence of space to breathe. Some small part of hope, some fragment of recognition, survived in the silent understanding between them — a witness to her courage, and to the love that, though unspoken, endured.

11.

Adira was the sparkle in Rudra's quiet world.The way she winked, the sudden excitement in her eyes, the innocent glow on her face — those small moments softened something deep inside him. Whenever she smiled, the chaos of his life fell silent for a while.

But Rudra knew the truth of his life. No strong finances. No real social standing. A future still under construction while others had already finished theirs.

Yet one truth inside him never changed. He liked Adira. And because he liked her so deeply, a painful thought kept returning like a whisper he could never silence: *Adira deserves more… much more.*
The thought sat inside his chest like a thorn — small, invisible, but endlessly painful.

Then there was Harshad. Stable. Secure. Certain. Everything Rudra was still struggling to become.Harshad could give Adira comfort, protection, a respected place in the world — a life without constant worry.

Rudra understood that.Being with Adira was the dream closest to his heart.But sometimes love is cruel to the one who feels it the most. So Rudra chose the quietest sacrifice.

For Adira's happiness. For her future. For the life she deserved. He let her, let her to be with, who could provide her better, a future a life she deserved. Because loving Adira was never about keeping her.

It was about wishing her a beautiful life —even if that life was without him. It was about blessing her life with happiness — even if that happiness did not include him.

This was not meant to be read by her.
'The Other Side'

Thank You !